

**Talking Sense: Sensory Communication in Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*, *Film* and *Quad* I + II**

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A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

Master of Arts in English

in the College of Arts

University of Canterbury

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University of Canterbury 2014

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Nicholas Wright, of the University of Canterbury English department. Nicholas has shown great patience, dedication and kindness and has stayed calm through the tumult of this thesis. He has tirelessly worked at turning my prose academic. He has waged war against vague mixed-metaphors, sweeping generalisations, unsubstantiated declarations of love for Beckett, wildly unfounded self-consciously poetic phrases, it-is-thuses, whereins, thereins, it may be considered thats, therefores and wherefores. He also stuck with me through these personal disaster-ridden, deadline-bending two and a bit years.

I would also like to thank Daniel Bedggood, who was instrumental in the embryonic stages of this thesis. He has also been a tireless and hawk-eyed proofreader in the final stages, with a particular nose for rooting out codswallop.

Thanks to the University of Canterbury for remaining upright on shaky ground, and for providing funding for this piece of work.

Thanks to Frances Martin, Jennifer Smart, Sarah O'Brien and Flora Knight for understanding the tantrums and for the cups of tea.

Thanks to Mum for loving kindly all the way through.

Thanks to Dad for scoffing at my extensions and generally keeping the fire going.

And to Alan and the as-yet-unborn person, who made the task of finishing this piece of writing seem an important one. It would have been impossible to carry on without the knowledge that it was time to return to the love of alive people, rather than one dead brilliant writer.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses Samuel Beckett's non-verbal language, as observed in his novel, *The Unnamable*, his film, *Film*, and his pieces for television, *Quadrat I + II*. Beckett's sensory focus is nascent in *The Unnamable*, as Beckett explores the disintegration of verbal language in order to prepare ground for imagery. Imagery, here, is considered to arise from an art that is able to communicate directly with the sensory capacities of its audience. This is in contrast to artworks that primarily utilise verbal language expression, and thus communicate sensory information indirectly. *Film* succeeds *The Unnamable* by eleven years and is, effectively, a silent work. Rather than existing as an image in its own right, however, *Film* is primarily involved in a discussion of the nature of imagery, as the subject matter of *Film* is a debate with Berkeley's statement "Esse est percipi", that is, "to be is to be perceived". In this film, the reader is encouraged to think about sensory engagement, rather than actively being engaged in a sensory way. *Quadrat I + II* were first broadcast in 1982 and are both speechless, though sound remains. These two works represent the culmination of Beckett's visual explorations as they engage with the senses directly. This thesis posits that the unique openness of Beckett's texts demands a particular creativity of its readers, in that the texts may be considered incomplete without reader/viewer contribution to meaning. Beckett's sensory focus means that readers' creative understanding of texts is often imagistic in its own right. In addition, the openness of Beckett's texts invites readers to share the experience of his protagonists. As protagonists are also presented as being involved in acts of creation, and are concerned with the nature of perception, this means that the experience of the reader is, effectively, one of making images. Thus, Beckett works to indirectly, as well as directly, to give the reader a sensory experience. This thesis primarily utilises the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and the theory of Phenomenology to defend this position.

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis concerns itself with the ways in which Samuel Beckett's work engages its readers and viewers on a sensory level. This aspect of Beckett's work is of particular interest as it enables his work to have an intense imagistic effect. Beckett's imagism has been covered in previous criticism, notably in Lois Oppenheim's *The Painted Word* and *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*. Texts may also be found that are concerned with the subject of the connection between Beckett and specific visual artists, for example, Charles Juliet's *Conversations with Beckett and Bram Van Velde* and Matti Megged's *Dialogue in the Void: Beckett and Giacometti*. However, the body of Beckett criticism shows that the sensory aspect of Beckett's works tends to be touched on as part of more generalised studies rather than focused on in its own right. This is despite evidence that critics seem to consistently describe Beckett's works using a visual vocabulary, thereby suggesting that the engagement of their sensory faculties is important to their experience of the text. Susan Brienza, for example, when speaking of Beckett's later fiction describes how: "Samuel Beckett's fiction after *The Unnamable* can continue by photographing itself: style comments on writing in these new worlds" (qtd in Pattie, 163). Other critics use visual verbs such as "see" rather than "think" or "read": "The body demands that it be seen... It challenges the observer to see it and not some text about it" (Ben-Zvi, "Biographical, Textual and Historical Origins", 149). Similarly, actors speak of the experience of being directed by Beckett in visual terms, as Billie Whitelaw describes: "It was like being painted with light. He used me as a piece of sculpture. I told him you could hang it on the wall" (qtd in Gussow, 101-102). These quotes suggest that the experience of reading or observing Beckett's work is a sensory experience, and thereby demands a sensory response.

The reaction of viewers and readers is likely to be similar to that of critics and actors,

as Beckett's *Not I* (1973)<sup>1</sup> shows. In this play, the narrative, as presented by mouth's speech, is performed at such a speed that full comprehension of the text is impossible. In contrast, the image of the mouth in darkness, half-open and speechless is fully present. This impression could well be a painting, and has been described as the “theatrical equivalent to one of Francis Bacon’s appalled images: a whole world of anguish squeezed into the tight white circle of a mouth” (Alvarez, 134). Daniel Albright, similarly, takes *Happy Days* (1961) to be defined by its stage image:

The fact that Winnie is buried up to her waist in Act 1, and up to her neck in Act 2, certainly suggests that there is some difference between one fraction of a second and the next, or at least that the prevailing state is a punctuated equilibrium. And yet, Beckett intended the two tableaux to melt together in the spectator’s mind into a sort of retinal montage, as if there were little real variation between them: “I am counting a lot on memory of 1 in 2, which is stupidly said, I mean a kind of physical post image of 1 all through 2”. (Albright, 75-6)

Here, Albright shows that despite narrative development in *Happy Days*, the impression left by the play is of a composite image.

This thesis discusses the progression of Beckett's art towards such stage images. It begins by considering *The Unnamable* (1953), which effectively marks the end of Beckett's career as an artist of the page. Prior to this novel, all of Beckett's works took the form of prose, poetry or criticism, with the exception of Beckett's play *Eleutheria* (written in 1947), which he considered to be a failure and refused to publish in his lifetime. While writing *The Unnamable*, Beckett began to write *Waiting for Godot* (written in 1952, published in 1956), which would become his most famous piece. The novel may be seen to foster a nascent

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<sup>1</sup> All plays referenced refer to versions published in English, as presented in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (2006). Dates refer to year of first publication, unless otherwise specified.

sensory focus that would be made explicit in Beckett's movement into the more immediate medium of theatre. *The Unnamable* is concerned primarily with the “exhaustion”<sup>2</sup> of the possibility of verbal language. It is only through exploring the sensory aspects of written language that Beckett was able to move effectively into the production of stage images. *Waiting for Godot* would not have been possible without *The Unnamable*, and, in turn, Beckett's later works for the stage and other media would not have been possible without *Waiting for Godot*. In terms of Beckett's oeuvre, *The Unnamable*, then, acts as a thesis for later works as it allows Beckett to explore language-based philosophy. This philosophical project enables Beckett to develop ideas within verbal language, which then are able to manifest as sensory expressions in later works. The unnamable<sup>3</sup>, for example, describes his attempt to reach a stable concept of “I”:

there is I, yes, I feel it, I confess, I give in, there is I... it has not yet been our good fortune to establish with any degree of accuracy what I am, where I am, whether I am words among words or silence in the midst of silence... if it's I who speak, and it may be assumed it is, as it may be suspected it is not. (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 106)

The unnamable investigates the “feeling” that he exists, despite being unable to define how he exists, or even whether he exists at all. The unnamable also struggles with the abstract nature of his words, as his utterances are unable to provide any kind of certainty. Through verbal language, Beckett philosophises on the nature of ego and explores how verbal language seems insufficient to the task of articulating the complex and fractured nature of that ego. In *Not I*, these ideas may be observed to develop into a stage image. For “Mouth”, the protagonist of this play, the stability of “I” is similarly unachievable, but, in addition to textual exploration

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2 I am indebted to Gilles Deleuze in the use of the term “exhaustion”. See Methodology for further discussion on my use of his philosophy.

3 The narrator of *The Unnamable* is unnamed. Thus, I am referring to the novel's protagonist in the use of the term “the unnamable”.

of speechlessness, Mouth becomes the embodiment of the fractured “I”<sup>4</sup>. The abstract nature of language becomes sensory, as Mouth is *observed* as unable to stop speaking, and is unable to say “I”. In *Not I*, the viewer sees and hears the act of speaking, rather than reading speech on the page. Both the unnamable and Mouth attempt to use verbal language to find a stable concept of “I”. In the former case, an attempt is made write thoroughly, so as to allow room for all language possibilities. This means that the unnamable, effectively, is engaged in a project of infinite writing, as it is not possible for him to satisfy his project. Similarly, Mouth speaks infinitely, so as to avoid the imperative to give herself a definitive identity. Thus, while the unnamable keeps language open by negating everything written, Mouth keeps speech open by refusing to allow speech to name its speaker.

*Not I* provides ample example of Beckett's use of both verbal and visual language. In regards to the question of ego, verbal language may be seen to manifest in the stories that are told in order to avoid saying “I”. Visual language may be observed in the image that mouth makes, which, while being a creation of the act of speaking, has power that is independent of verbal language. Mouth defies definitions of verbal language through visual language by clamping shut every time there is an imperative to say “I”. In *Quadrat I + II* (1984), the infinite project, as observed in both *The Unnamable* and *Not I*, is expressed at the level of bodies and images, that is, infinity is expressed entirely through visual language. In *Quad*, the question of ego and identity as embodied by the word “I” is no longer represented verbally as speech is non-existent in the piece. Instead, the figures are observed to be engaged in a struggle with apparently constant movement. Here, Beckett produces a stage image that affects the viewer on a primarily sensory level, as movement can be seen and heard in the sound of footsteps. *Quad*, then, is read directly by the senses, rather than being mediated

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4 See Appendix 1 for a still from this play (Stephenson).



through verbal language. The infinite project, as traced through Beckett's oeuvre, is expressed in progressively more sensory terms. *The Unnamable* thus functions to prepare ground: it enables Beckett to explore concepts that later manifest as images.

Beckett's tendency to work in restricted media, where experience is narrowed to one or two major senses, is also important to the development of Beckett's art. The radio plays of the 1950s, namely *All That Fall* (1957) and *Embers* (1959), for example, “taught (Beckett) to remove the speech from the bodies so that when he put the two back together... they would carry with them all the alienation, incapacity and power required for the expression of the inexpressible” (Richardson and Hale, 286-7). Beckett's radio plays allowed him to explore body and voice separately, so that subsequent stage and screen images were able to make effective use of disembodied voices.<sup>5</sup> Beckett's silent film, entitled *Film* (1967), contains no sound at all apart from the “sssh!” at the beginning which serves to silence all further speech (Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, 323). Thus, while radio as a medium creates disembodied voices, film as a medium may be used to create speechless bodies. Albright describes Beckett's fascination with the use of media that are, by nature, deprived of the full spectrum of sensory potential, as this works to foregrounds sensory information:

He was especially intrigued by media that contain striking defects: radio promotes the concept of blindness from an individual deficiency to a universal rule; the silent film behaves similarly with such concepts as deafness, ignorance, self-immuring – the characters, being mute, must shout with their gestures and pretend to understand one another; television seems to project precarious images which are always in danger of vanishing into a field of dancing gray dots. (Albright, 6)

*Film*, in lieu of communicative voice, then, is able to focus on the physical body, with

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<sup>5</sup> *Eh Joe* (1967), for example, contains a man in a grey Beckettian room spoken to in an accusing tone by a disembodied female voice. The voice is divorced from its image, as in a radio play.

particular emphasis on the human eye. The restriction of the media, then, allows Beckett to isolate the sense of sight, and to develop its expressive potential. While *Film* would seem to be the natural pinnacle to Beckett's sensory exploration, it seems that instead, *Film* acts much as *The Unnamable* does, that is, to prepare ground for further experiment. Beckett uses the filmed eye to consider perception and to explore George Berkeley's statement: "Esse est percipi", which translates as "to be is to be perceived" (Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, 323). In *Film*, Beckett effectively creates a work *about* the nature of seeing, where the viewer is told the *story* of the impossibility of escaping one's own perception. The unnamable's struggle with "I" is, then, effectively made visually manifest in *Film*. In the latter piece, Beckett takes the concept of the impossibility of escaping from self, as well as the impossibility of knowing self as its subject matter, and visual language rather than verbal language as its mode of expression. In turn, the production of a piece such as *Quad* becomes possible, where no narrative residue exists, and image is able to exist solely on its own terms. *Quad* acts as an "attempt, to get to a kind of poetry that doesn't need words anymore", and is able to be read as performance art rather than text (*Waiting for Beckett*, 01.08.16). In this piece for television, the viewer engages with spatiality, movement and rhythm, and comprehension becomes primarily based on direct sensory experience.

## METHODOLOGY

Writing about Beckett, perhaps more so than writing about any other writer, is a fraught business. Because Beckett's works are often outwardly incomprehensible, the critic's urge is to find an intellectual schema that will unlock Beckett's secrets and enable the work to be understood. Beckett, however, specifically resists being understood in a solely symbolic way, as he tells us in *Watt* (1953): “no symbols where none intended” (Beckett, *Watt*, 254). In critiquing Beckett's work, then, it is important to consider Beckett's own anti-philosophical stance, and to appreciate that his work is irreducible to absolutes. However, it is also important not to allow Beckett's words to prevent engagement with philosophy, as this, in itself, would unnecessarily limit critical possibilities. Critic Gary Kemp warns that “Beckett’s disavowal of philosophical purpose is thus misleading, perhaps even disingenuous”, thereby suggesting that Beckett is unable to escape philosophy entirely (Kemp, 168). In the case of writing about Beckett, then, the purpose of critical engagement with philosophy must be to open up possibilities of reading, rather than to arrive at a single, multi-purpose reading, as in Beckett's work, “there’s no such thing as an answer, there isn’t even such thing as a riddle” (Albright, 120). This thesis explores the sensory elements of Beckett's art as a means of further understanding the vastness of its uncertainty, rather than seeking to offer a single, definitive answer to its “riddle”.

When considering the non-verbal in Beckett's work, it is important to acknowledge the contradiction inherent in this approach. Beckett is involved in a task or expressing his frustration with language, largely through the use of spoken and/or written words. Thus, the contribution of words and language to Beckett's sensory project must be acknowledged. When describing *Footfalls*, Beckett has said that: “It is about the pacing: nine steps one way, nine steps the other. The fall of feet. The sound of feet. Walking on the ground, as on a tomb. The

words are less important, but they are essential” (qtd in Gussow, 34). Beckett does not, then, eschew verbal language entirely, as the disembodied monologue of May's mother is crucial to the effectiveness of the piece. Instead, visual language, as represented by the moving stage image of May's pacing, is given special significance due to its ability to connect with the viewer on a sensory level. Beckett also gives special significance to the sound of footfalls, and thus evokes a sonic language that communicates with the listener in a sensory way. This sonic information works both with and apart from spoken monologue, which is also perceived aurally, but which communicates as verbal language. This thesis considers Beckett to be an artist who tends towards “ugliness and panic”, as Bram van Velde describes, and as an artist who creates works with an understanding of the fluidity of ideas and forms (qtd in Juliet, 87). Beckett's works are not just paintings, nor are they just novels or plays: they exist, rather, as explorations at the boundaries of genres.

In attempting to understand the the task of criticism of Beckett's work, the response of visual artists to those works is of interest.<sup>6</sup> This criticism manifests as *livres d'artiste*, or “Artist’s Books”, in which the artist, effectively, provides illustration to Beckett's narratives. In these books, Beckett allowed great freedom of interpretation in the responses to his texts, seemingly in direct contrast to his fastidious protectiveness over the production of his plays.<sup>7</sup> I posit that Beckett allowed such freedoms as, by nature, these artists' responses are creative acts in their own right and are therefore as open to interpretation as the original pieces of fiction. Jacques Derrida also provides insight into the nature of Beckett criticism, as he works in full awareness of the precariousness of his position as critic. Derrida also considers the absurdity of the idea of offering a conclusive response to Beckett's art:

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6 An example is Avigdor Arikha's *Au Loin Un Oiseau*, which is an illustrated version of Beckett's *Fizzle 3: A Far a Bird*. See Appendix 2 for examples of the artist's etchings.

7 In 1984, for example, Beckett famously attempted to legally prevent *Endgame* from being performed on a set representing an abandoned subway.

How could I write in French in the wake of or 'with' someone who does operations on this language which seem to me so strong and so necessary, but which must remain idiomatic? How could I write, sign, countersign performatively texts which 'respond' to Beckett? How could I avoid the platitude of a supposed academic metalanguage? (qtd in Critchley, 169)

Derrida argues that there is no absolute critical response to Beckett's work, and thereby assimilates Beckett's work into his project of “Deconstruction”, which works to unravel the “total, definite and finite” (Dick and Wolfreys, 55). Derrida's project pays heed to the problematic nature of oppositional or binary thinking, and is observant of the contradictory nature of his task as a critic. This task may be compared to Beckett's task as a writer, that is, to use a problematic language in order to express the problems of that language.

Verbal language has become problematic for Beckett as it is distant from the source of its art: it is “reduced to making 'pictures of pictures of pictures’” (Ben-Zvi, “Beckett, Mauthner”, 190). I refer here to the idea that verbal language appears to exist as a set of resolved definitions, which, in effect, are unable to express what they are generally believed to express, as the connections between signifier, signified and referent<sup>8</sup> are purely abstract. Theodor Adorno is also cogent of this problem, and warns that assumptions regarding the communicative power of verbal language are inappropriate:

For communicative language postulates... through logic, the nature of conclusions, and stable concepts – the principle of sufficient reason. Yet this requirement is hardly met any more: when people speak with each other, they are motivated partly by their psychology or pre-logical unconscious, and partly by their pursuit of purposes.

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8 I am referring here to Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics, where the referent is considered to be an object 'of the world', which is conceptualised in the signified, which, in turn is referred to with the signifier, that is, in the context of verbal language, with a particular word or phrase. Together the signified and signifier are referred to as a linguistic sign.

(Adorno, 139-140)

Adorno suggests that verbal language is understood in a wide variety of ways at the level of individual understanding. Thus, the definition of each word is relatively unstable, and the idea that one may communicate stable meaning through verbal language becomes problematic. It is under these circumstances that Beckett seeks to critique verbal language, and, in his exploration of the sensory elements of language, to find less problematic modes of expression. Fritz Mauthner's *Contributions Toward a Critique of Language* describes a skepticism that relates well to Beckett's critique. I quote at length:

In the Beginning was the Word. With the word, men stand at the beginning of their insight into the world, and if they stay with the word they'll stop there. He who wishes to move on... must try to redeem the world from the tyranny of language.... He who sets out to write a book with a hunger for words, with a love of words, and with the vanity of words, in the language of yesterday or of today or of tomorrow, in the congealed language of a certain and firm step, he cannot undertake the task of liberation from language. I must destroy language within me, in front of me, and behind me step for step if I want to ascend in the critique of language, which is the most pressing task for thinking man; I must shatter each rung of the ladder by stepping upon it. He who wishes to follow me must reconstitute the rungs in order to shatter them once again. The renunciation of self-delusion is contained in the insight: I am writing a book against language in a rigid language. Since language is alive it does not remain unchanged from the beginning of a sentence up to its end. "In the Beginning was the Word;" here, while I am uttering the sixth word, the initial phrase "in the beginning" has already changed its meaning. Thus, I had to arrive at the decision either to publish these fragments as fragments or to deliver up the entire work to its

most radical redeemer: fire. Fire would have brought peace. However, as long as he is alive, man is like living language and believes that he has something to say because he speaks. (qtd in Ben-Zvi, “Beckett, Mauthner”, 187)

Here, Mauthner discusses the radicality of Beckett's task as a writer: the destruction of a language he recognises as a fundamentally limited tool. Crucially, however, Beckett's task is also to create, and to use language while being cogent of its limitations. Writing under these circumstances is a seemingly contradictory exercise, as the writer is cogent of only being able to create scattered pieces of meaning. However, it may be argued that the acknowledgement of the impossibility of writing and of the limitations of language makes the writer's creations in that language all the more powerful. Mauthner describes how “language is alive”, and, dramatically, suggests offering up artwork to fire before noting that language is too present to be burnt out, as man will continue to speak. Mauthner is himself relying on language in order to express the problems of that language. Beckett's own, succinct appraisal of his project is articulated in his novella *Worstward Ho* (1983) as “Fail again. Fail better” (Beckett, *Nohow On*, 89). Expression through verbal language may be seen to be a continual failure, yet in Beckett's work, that failure becomes an important project in its own right. It is from this position of failure of verbal language that alternative communicative means, such as Beckett's sensory language, are developed.

The contradictory nature of the writer's task is also explored in Simon Critchley's text *Very Little... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature* through an exploration of Maurice Blanchot's concept of the origin of artwork:

Blanchot's original insight, obsessively reiterated in his work, is that the desire that governs writing has for its (impossible) origin this experience of the night, which is the experience of a dying stronger than death.... Writing is not a desire for the beautiful

artwork but for the origin of the artwork, its nocturnal source; which is why Blanchot defines the writer as 'the insomniac of the day'. (Critchley, 36)

Blanchot here speaks of the writer's condition as one of being estranged, and in turn, of being close to the edge of an unobservable space that is difficult to perceive, let alone describe.

Blanchot's space gives further weight to the idea that language is inadequate, as the writer has a "bewildering obligation to write unknowingly, impotently, impossibly, nothing" (Willits, 259). The writer, as described by Blanchot, is situated at the edge of language and desires to express impossible subject matter. Beckett may be considered to be an artist in such a space as he:

speaks of his fetal existence (which he claims to remember) as a "state of barrenness and of pain" defined as "agony and darkness." He compares this prenatal state with the "fear and emptiness" of self-perception, and remarks that if his work means anything, it is because of the "ignorance, inability," and "intuitive despair" that he experiences as he writes "in the dark". (Begam, 280)

While Blanchot and Beckett's description of the impossibility of expression may be applied to artists working in more visual media, the use of verbal language may be considered to heighten the writers' sense of insurmountability. This is because words are, by their nature, meant to be representative, whereas brushstrokes may function representatively or non-representatively: brushstrokes have no specific definition. Beckett struggles with language as he finds it insufficient to the task of describing his experience of "the dark". In a seemingly contradictory way, however, Beckett's continual failure results in prose that is remarkable in its own right. Beckett's inhabitation of a space at the edge of possibility of language produces an art that is unique and experimental, and he remains a canonical writer despite, or perhaps because of, his acknowledgement of the impossibility of his project.



Beckett's response to the problem posed by verbal language may be seen, in some ways, to manifest as an exploration of the sensory imagistic capabilities of that language. This focus begs comparison with visual art, which naturally focuses on the sensory experience of sight, rather than the abstracted experience of reading words and conjuring images from what is described in a text. In existing Beckett criticism, the connection between visual art and Beckett's art is often discussed in intellectual terms in that it focuses on similarities in philosophical ideas between Beckett and specific painters. Two such examples are the aforementioned texts *Dialogue in the Void: Beckett and Giacometti* and *Conversations with Beckett and Bram Van Velde*. These texts are problematic in that they engage, counter-intuitively, with the verbal connection between writer and artists, that is, with descriptive explanations of their art, and the purpose for making that art. The texts focus on shared subject matter at the expense of a comparison between the effects artworks have on viewers and readers. In addition, the texts lack comparison of expressive modes, that is the media of painting and sculpture as employed by Bram van Velde and Alberto Giacometti, and Beckett's use of plays, novels, silent films etcetera. Everett C. Frost, in his essay 'Meditating On: Beckett, Embers, and Radio' describes how, in Beckett's art, "way said takes precedence over... *what* said" (Frost, 316). Frost thereby suggests that it is appropriate to adopt a stylistic approach to analysis, and to focus on the way Beckett's words are presented, rather than their content. In light of this statement, this thesis considers the instinctual elements of Beckett's art as, in many ways, it is these elements that make the experience of Beckett's art so remarkably sensory. Diane Collinson has said: "if we think back to the remark 'Ah, that sunlit field', it is the 'Ah' more than the 'sunlit field' that reveals the sensuous immediacy of the aesthetic moment" (qtd in Del Degan, 242). Collinson describes how the abstract word "Ah" gives this sentence sensual meaning, whereas the non-abstract words give its subject matter. In Beckett's

work *Ping*, the importance of “way said” is similarly evidenced:

All known all white bare white body fixed one yard legs joined like sewn... Bare white body fixed only the eyes only just. Hands hanging palms front white feet heels together right angle... Head haught eyes light blue almost white silence within... Given rose only just bare white body fixed one yard invisible all known all within... Ping perhaps not alone one second with image always the same time a little less that much memory almost never Ping silence... (Beckett, *No's Knife*, 166-167)

Here, language is used in a largely spatial way, and reads like instructions for the construction of an image, rather than the construction of a story. The passage contains very few verbs, and the verbs that are used, such as “hanging”, provide no sense of action or narrative movement. Progression occurs as the narrator shifts the lens to reveal parts of the image, rather than through time passing. Time, when referred to, is described as fleeting: “one second” and “almost never”. The subject of the narration, thus, contributes to the impression of a single atomised moment of vision. Stylistically, Beckett's use of one and two-syllable words also contribute to this effect. Paul Cézanne explains that: “Literature expresses itself by abstractions, whereas painting by means of drawing and colour gives concrete shape to sensations and perception” (Chipp, 20). As can be observed in this extract from *Ping*, Beckett's prose, whilst using abstract verbal language, is able to function in a way similar to Cézanne's painting, in that it works to engage the readers' senses and to narrate image construction, and, in turn, to express sensation in a concrete way. At this stage, it is important to critique the idea that Beckett privileges “way said” over “what said”. In *Ping*, content works with form to create a sensory impression, thus, effectively, there is no boundary between the what said (the words and content), and the way said (the effect and form of words). Frost himself goes on to say: “But it would be more accurate to say that way-said is

*itself* an essential part of what-said” (Frost, 316).

As Beckett's art develops, however, it appears that he expresses himself increasingly through media that foreground elements of “way said”, such as the physicality of human form and voice. As Beckett moves away from novels, and towards increasingly experimental theatre and film/television, he is able to connect more tangibly with his audience's sensory capacities. Beckett's stylistic progression is articulated by Gilles Deleuze in his essay 'The Exhausted'. This text describes how language must continually “exhaust... the possible” in order that it may give way to imagery (Deleuze, 3). Deleuze describes language in Beckett's work as passing through stages of progressive exhaustion, which he names “language I”, “language II” and “language III”:

Let's call *language I* [*langue I*] this atomic language in Beckett – disjunctive, abrupt, jerky, where enumeration replaces propositions, and combinatorial relations replace syntactic relations – a language of names. But if you hope thus to exhaust the possible with words, you must equally hope to exhaust words themselves; hence the necessity for another metalanguage, for a *language II*, no longer that of names but of voices, a language that no longer operates with combinable atoms but with blendable flows. The voices are waves or flows that direct and distribute linguistic corpuscles. When you exhaust the possible with words, you trim and chop atoms, and when you exhaust the words themselves, you dry up the flow.... There is therefore a *language III* [*langue III*] that no longer relates language [*le langage*] to objects that can be enumerated and combined, nor to transmitting voices, but to immanent limits that never cease to move about – hiatuses, holes or tears you couldn't account for, attributing them to simple tiredness, if they didn't expand suddenly to welcome something coming from outside or elsewhere: “Blanks for when words gone. When nohow on. Then all seen as only

then. Undimmed. All undimmed that words dim. All so seen unsaid”. This something seen or heard is called Image, visual or aural, provided it is liberated from the chains it was kept in by the other two languages.... It is extremely difficult to make a pure image, unsullied, that is nothing but image, arriving at the point where it suddenly appears in all its singularity. (Deleuze, 7-9)

Here Deleuze describes the way in which Beckett's concern with the limit of language has powerful imagistic consequences. This is not to say that Beckett, as he develops as an artist, becomes a painter, but rather that he is able to release imagery through his work as a writer.

Deleuze defines image not:

through the sublimeness of its content, but through its form – its “internal tension” – or through the force it gathers to make the void or to bore holes, to loosen the grip of words, to dry up the oozing of voices, so as to disengage itself from memory and reason: little alogical image, amnesiac, almost aphasic, now standing in the void, now shivering in the open. The image is not an object but a “process”. (Deleuze, 9)

Beckett works to exhaust the possibility of language rather than to destroy it, and it is thus that language is an essential part of his project. Deleuze's theory is used in this thesis to note Beckett's development as a writer as he progresses through language and towards imagery. Considering Beckett's work in terms of Deleuze's philosophy is appropriate as Deleuze himself identifies Beckett as an ideal example of many of his ideas. This is most directly manifest in the aforementioned essay 'The Exhausted', but is also evident at the basic level of shared understanding of the limitations of traditional philosophy. Beckett can be seen to work towards a philosophy that allows for multiple truths, rather than singular meanings. Deleuze's work demands a similar openness:

If there is one understanding of philosophy and good reading as grounded in

consistency and doxa, which would return a text to an assimilable logic and allow thought to remain the same, Deleuze places himself in a counter-tradition of distinction and paradox.... More than any other thinker of his time Deleuze works against vitalism or the idea that reason, thinking and concepts somehow serve a function or purpose of life. (Parr, 4)

Deleuze and Beckett's project, then, is similar in that it seeks to allow multiple possibilities for understanding, and seeks to achieve this through philosophical openness. In addition, both show interest in knowledge as gained through sensory exploration, and seek to move beyond verbal language while expressing themselves in that language. Deleuze “privileges painting as an art form that affords a concrete apprehension of the forces that render a body”, and Beckett moves towards speechlessness (17). Beckett's *Quadrat I + II* are, essentially, filmed bodies in movement that demand such “concrete apprehension” by the viewer. Deleuze's view of imagery as existing at a point beyond language is a concept echoed by the Imagist poets<sup>9</sup>. While the manifestation of that poetry may not be properly compared to Beckett's work, their manifesto and sensory focus begs comparison. The Imagists were cogent of the limitations of expression through verbal language, and sought “to employ always the exact word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word” (Lowell). In this, poets hoped to reconnect with direct sensory experience, which lead them to state that “Imagism is presentation, not representation” (Lowell). In speaking of Beckett's imagery, then, I refer to those elements that function at the edge, or at times, beyond verbal language and are able, by occupying this space, to connect with the reader in a way that is less abstracted than solely verbal communication.

Jacques Derrida's philosophy is similarly useful in exploring Beckett's relationship with verbal language as Derrida diagnoses our world as being constrained by reductive

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<sup>9</sup> I refer here to the poetry movement of the early Twentieth Century, in which Ezra Pound was the most famed member.

language, as “[o]ur oppression is not merely in our historical legacy, but in our very words” (May, 11). Derrida explores the lack of clarity of word definitions, as he notes that the opposite of each spoken word necessarily becomes part of that word.<sup>10</sup> Thus, other meanings infiltrate our definitions, and, in turn, “those words will never be able to be fixed in a way that is solid enough to provide the type of foundation philosophy seeks” (12). Derrida and Beckett share an awareness of the contradictory nature of language and are cogent of the idea that it seeks to define, but is unable to create clear categories for definition. It is thus that philosophy, in order to be honest, must acknowledge the impossibility of its project, and aim to provide multiplicitous rather than singular meaning. As has been observed, Beckett's artistic project has similar aims. Derrida's philosophy is also applicable to Beckett's work if one considers his conception of “aporia”. Like Deleuze's words “alogical, amnesiac and aphasic”, aporia aptly describes the point at which language becomes expressive of something other than what it is assumed to mean. Derrida's aporia refers to an expressive “limit”:

Rhetorically, the aporia is that figure of speech in which, through which, I express a difficulty or recognise in this difficulty an insuperable problem.... Philosophically, an aporia is also a difficulty, perhaps, though not exclusively, an enigma, certainly an impasse that announces – announcing itself as – a limit; as, for example, in, or to thought, to the working through of a problem or difficulty, in the quest for an answer or a truth. (Dick and Wolfreys, 9)

The limit of aporia, as conceived by Derrida, is notable in that it demands activity. Aporia is not an insurmountable impasse that necessarily marks the end of thinking. Rather, aporia presents as a limit that marks the beginning of thinking, and, notably, the beginning of thinking that does not assume a stable ground of definitions. Derrida's aporia, then, demands

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<sup>10</sup> “Absence does not appear as other, outside of presence, against which it is understood. It is internal to presence. If we were to put the matter paradoxically, we might say that pure presence can be understood only on the basis of an absence that inhabits it and is partially constitutive of it” (May, 11).

thinking as a creative, rather than logical act. Here, Derrida's philosophy merges with Deleuze's, who states that: "Philosophy does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by truth. Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure" (qtd in May, 22). I argue that Blanchot's insomniac experience, Deleuze's exhausted experience and Derrida's aporetic experience all act as explanations of Beckett's particular creativity, that is, a creativity situated at the edge of the possible in language. These philosophers all articulate spaces where it becomes inconceivable that the writer should be able to find adequate expression through readily available means. Under these circumstances, the honest writer must seek new possibilities, and it is thus that Beckett explores sensory language and is, eventually able to liberate his images.

Phenomenological theory provides further insight into the effect of the sensory aspects of art, and explores the way in which viewers and readers that engage in those elements are able to gain knowledge through experience, rather than through intellectual understanding. As Beckett explores the edge of language, he begins to explore art forms that more directly present sensory information. Bodies and faces focused on perceiving and listening, or being watched or spoken to, become central to both the way said and the what said of Beckett's theatre and television.<sup>11</sup> Sensation, thus, drives Beckett's art, and phenomenology, as a canonical theory of experience in art, must be considered. Deleuze critiques the tendency of phenomenology to situate its discussion at the level of individual experience:

In Deleuze's view, phenomenology's emphasis on lived experience territorialises philosophy onto habitual forms of perception and conception (perception formed from the point of view of the self or thought in keeping with the form of the 'I'). Deleuze sought to determine an 'impersonal' and 'pre-individual transcendental field' that is the

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<sup>11</sup> *Film*, for example focuses on self-perception, and *Quad* on continual and unexplained movements of bodies. Other pieces, such as *Rockaby* and *Eh Joe* focus on silent bodies/faces listening to disembodied voices.

condition of any actual conscious experience. (Parr, 206-7)

Derrida, too, criticises phenomenological thought for “wanting to discern from linguistic expression the possibility of truth, a truth that is necessarily prior to the sign” (Wortham, 200). Both philosophers, however, succeed phenomenology, and, in addition to critiquing its validity, necessarily inherit certain characteristics. Phenomenology's focus on the importance of sensory experience for knowledge, for example, manifests in Derrida and Deleuze's movement away from overly didactic philosophy, and specifically in their evocation of the experiences of aporia and exhaustion. Phenomenology is applicable to Beckett's work which similarly seeks new, experience-based relations with philosophy. Immanuel Kant, who was an important forerunner to phenomenology explains how sensory information effects thought: “What is encountered is not an object but a difference in sensation, one that wounds or strains existing categories of sense perception, and that transmits a shock to thought because it disrupts thought's ready concepts, determining instead a mutation in thought” (Wasser, 124). In turn, phenomenology describes the experience of the viewer when presented with art as one of becoming sensuously connected to the artwork, to the point where one is unable to detach oneself from the process of viewing:

To be focused on the staircase in the way that one must be – in other words, in order to descend it quickly and effectively one must avoid viewing the stairs in a detached or spectatorial attitude. The absorbed or engaged attitude is the perceptual attitude we adopt with respect to objects when we see them as things in our meaningful environment. (Kelly, 97)

Paul Cézanne's apples, which were the subject of many of his paintings,<sup>12</sup> are often cited as examples that encourage such a phenomenological engaged attitude, as they are painted with their own “weight, heftiness and independence”, and thereby offer the viewer an experience

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 4, Cézanne, Paul. *Apples and Oranges*.



of perceiving the apples as apples, rather than as images of apples, detached from their source (Kelly, 99). Similarly, Jean Siméon Chardin's painting *Soap Bubbles*<sup>13</sup> works to engage the viewer “by catching the agent in the midst of engaged activity seems to extend beyond the instant it represents” (Kelly, 102). In this painting, the painted subject is presented as absorbed in the process of blowing the bubble, and the viewer then perceives the activity as a process, rather than as a single event. The painting exhibits an engaged figure, as Cézanne exhibits engaged objects, and thus demands that the viewer adopt a similarly engaged attitude. The subjects of these paintings represent an immediacy derived from inhabitation of their own space, and, as Sean Dorrance Kelly describes, “These are genuine features of our engaged experience of objects, rather than features of the retinal image” (Kelly, 99). Similarly, Beckett's figures in *Quad* are presented as engaged in movement, as there is no narrative to accompany movement, rather, movement may be considered to be in progress. The piece takes its subject matter, then, to be the absorbed attitude of a person's experience of movement: the subject matter of *Quad* is the attitude of walking down the stairs. Beckett portrays figures who are sensuously engaged in their environment, and, in order to understand the presented movement, viewers must similarly engage their senses. Application of phenomenological theory enables a focus on the reader/viewer's experience of an artwork, as it demands consideration of the way in which those artworks present and engage sensory experiences.

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13 See Appendix 3, Chardin, Jean Siméon. *Soap Bubbles*.

### *THE UNNAMABLE*

Beckett's *The Unnamable* is the last novel in what may loosely be described as a trilogy of novels. While the novels do not serve as a trilogy in the traditional sense of the word, as they are not progressively plotted, they may be considered to progressively develop in terms of style, and to tell “the story of dissolution in three parts” (Carnero-Gonzalez, 207). The trilogy enables Beckett to be considered an artist particularly concerned with the development of new forms of expression, rather than simply new stories. *The Unnamable* is remarkable in that it took Beckett almost twice as long to write and almost three times as long to translate, when compared with the earlier novels in the trilogy (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, x-xi). Beckett also made many more changes to the piece in translation when compared to the other two novels: “the English text seems (again if only to the comparing eye) angrier, more pained and more bitterly uncompromising than the French” (xii-xiii). The difficulties Beckett experienced may be partly explained by the fact that he was writing the novel in parallel to writing *Waiting for Godot*. *The Unnamable* was, then, Beckett's last piece as an artist whose focus was primarily text-based, and marks an important stage in Beckett's questioning of form and verbal language.

Beckett, in writing *The Unnamable*, may be considered to be exploring the edge of possibility in language. An examination of Beckett's experience in this creative space may be considered in light of Blanchot's philosophy, which describes the condition of the writer as writing out of dread, or out of “a desire... for the origin of the artwork” rather than out of a desire for “production of meaning and beauty” (Critchley, 36). Blanchot's writer, rather than experiencing confidence and clear sightedness, is experiencing the need to express while being cogent of the fact that their task is impossible; the writer has the “bewildering obligation to write unknowingly, impotently, impossibly, nothing” (Willits, 259). Beckett, as a

writer, is similarly concerned with the impossibility of his task as a writer, and, similarly, the protagonist in *The Unnamable* may be seen to dramatise this experience: “you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 134). Beckett, in addition to critiquing verbal language, may be seen to experiment with sensory focused expression in that language through his use of onomatopoeia. Beckett's onomatopoeia is not of the variety seen in our vocabulary of animal sounds (for example), where “cow's go moo”, and moo, as a word, “sounds like” the noise a cow makes in nature. Rather, it takes the form of Hugh Bredin's onomatopoeia, that is “the *sound as related to something*... [this is its] essential nature” (Bredin, 557). This definition acknowledges the connection between sound and meaning, and appeals to the importance of the way said of words. Beckett's critique of verbal language, as well as his focus on the way said of language, is significant as it provides philosophical and experimental ground for Beckett's later, more tangibly visible works. Beckett's relationship to phenomenological theory is also of interest in the consideration of his relationship to sensory-focused language. Phenomenology has been described as “a general methodology that emphasizes studying empirical phenomena directly, as they are perceived by the senses” (Bakker, 674). In *The Unnamable*, Beckett privileges meaning as gained through bodily apprehension and experience, rather than through detached intellectual deduction.

The structure of *The Unnamable* also contributes to Beckett's language critique, as the plot moves back and forwards in a continual motion of creation and destruction and works to destabilise narrative meaning. Subsequently, it is uncertainty rather than any fixed trajectory that defines the novel. The movement of ideas that forms the structure of the novel may be considered to further Beckett's sensory aims as they effectively work to create the impression of concurrent or circular time rather than linear time. A neat analogy is that of cubist paintings, where many sides of the same object are presented in the same image and

“[t]hrough [the] several representations of the same object [the artist] can provide an analytical study of that object which the spectator then fuses into one again in his mind” (Chipp, 256). While the movement of time remains central to cubism, that time is presented so as to create an impression of simultaneity rather than linearity. Time is represented in the changing viewpoint as the artist moves around an object, yet these impressions are superimposed rather than presented as a sequence. In this respect, cubism stays true to the media that is painting, as the “primary, or most important qualities” of that media are “the object's form and its position in space” (256). Beckett's use of time is closely aligned with that of the cubists as he too creates a simultaneous expression of many moments that have the effect of a single image.

#### *Beckett's creative condition*

The creative condition of a writer such as Beckett may be considered in light of Blanchot's philosophy. Blanchot admits that the writer, necessarily, participates in his/her worldly context, but also speaks of how they must exist outside of that context: “Blanchot summons the writer to the limit-experience of the eternal return of naught, an experience that transforms the writer into a witless insomniac, eyes wide but seeing nothing at all, almost, who ushers the night into day: an experience of non-identity and difference-in-itself” (Willits, 258). While Blanchot's philosophy is problematic in its romanticisation of the task of the writer, it is of interest to this discussion in that it articulates an intense difficulty in expression. Beckett struggles with a creative project that he sees as, effectively, impossible: “One may as well dare to be plain and say that not knowing is not only not knowing what one is, but also where one is, and what change to wait for, and how to get out of wherever one is, and how to know... and so on” (qtd in Gontarski, “Creative Involution”, 609). Critchley further explains Blanchot's creative experience:

writing has its unattainable source in an experience of worklessness and a movement of infinite dying; this has variously been described as... the experience of the other night and the impossibility of death. And yet, second, the extremity of this experience cannot be faced, it would be intolerable to the human organism, and the writer is therefore necessarily blind to the guiding insights of his or her work. (Critchley, 84)

The writer must, therefore, write, though they are engaged in an experience for which there are no appropriate words.

In *The Unnamable*, this creative condition is dramatized through its protagonist. The unnamable's story is, like Beckett's, written entirely from the edge of possible experience, in that each time his experience becomes familiar; each time its rawness is softened slightly, something changes and his world is painful and strange once more: "The dulling effect of habit, how do they deal with that? They can combat it of course, raising the voice, increasing the light" (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 83). In response to the consistently threatening nature of his experience, the unnamable's voice consistently shifts in an attempt to dull its effects. The unnamable, then, narrates in many different voices, including a humorous voice, which may be considered to be a distraction from continual threat, as well as a panicked voice which effectively succumbs to that threat. The unnamable also experiments with an open voice, which invites the reader into argument with the text and participation in creative processes, and works to directly implicate him or her in the text's threat. These voices will receive in depth analysis in due course, but, as a list, they work to show the decentralisation of the unnamable character, as Richard Begam describes:

the locutor should not... be thought of as a character so much as a depersonalized function, a locus or site from which discourse emanates.... The locutor has no fixed residence... it carries on a kind of itinerant discourse, a locution without a location....

The “identity” of the locutor is shifting and inconstant: unlike a narrator, a locutor may speak with Basil's voice in one breath and Mahood's in the next... whichever interpretation we choose, the result is the same: a speaking voice has dispersed itself across a field of grammatical and referential possibilities; a speaking voice has, in effect, dislocated itself. (Begam, 879)

The unnamable's multi-faceted voice may be considered as an experiment that occurs because of Beckett's position close to the edge of language; as a voice that enables Beckett to critique the idea that verbal language is able to provide coherent means of expression. However, while the unnamable has no fixed voice, his words do continue to emerge on the page. The unnamable is decentralised, but decentralisation is not complete. Consequently, “Beckett’s figures recognize that their voices, their stories, are not absolutely their own creations; but they also know – and this is crucial – that nothing could come closer to being theirs” (Kemp, 181). The unnamable, therefore, must write, must express his own experience, though, because his voice is indefinable, his task hovers close to the impossible. The contradictory nature of the unnamable's task is similar to Beckett's, as words must be used to express their own futility. The unnamable attempts to explore the meaning of “I”, without hope of resolving that meaning: “not only that I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more interesting, but also that I, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I forget, no matter. And at the same time I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 1). The unnamable here attempts to connect his voice and his subject, but finds that the “I” is not stable, and that his subject is ungraspable. The unnamable also passes comment on the dislocation of other voices: “I think Murphy spoke now and then, the others too perhaps. I don't remember, but it was clumsily done, you could see the ventriloquist” (63). The unnamable's experience of

dislocation works in parallel with Beckett's own creative experience. The experience of writer and protagonist, in turn, work to raise questions regarding the stability of language.

*The facets of the unnamable's voice*

As a result of dislocation, the unnamable speaks in a multitude of different voices. One such voice is his “open voice”, that is, the voice which continuously breaks the novel's reality and invites the reader to argue with presented information: “We'll suppose something else, in order to get on a little further, that it is in fact required of me that I say something, something that is not to be found in all I have said up to now. That seems a reasonable assumption” (22). In this passage, the unnamable assumes the existence of a magic word, as in order to keep telling his story, he must create some reason for continuing to speak. His voice is uncertain, and, rather than taking his words to be absolutely true, the reader may take them to be arguable. Rather than suspending disbelief, and passively accepting presented narratives, the reader must provide coherency through his or her interpretation of that narrative, and is thus directly implicated in the production of meaning in the novel. Critchley describes the task of the reader as recognising what the writer is unable to recognise, due to the impossibility of the writer's task: “Perhaps the task of the *reader*, however, is to see... ambiguity *as* ambiguity and to point towards its source” (Critchley, 85). The experience of the reader being at the forefront of creativity in a novel may be likened to the experience of watching a play, where the audience works to change the theatrical space by virtue of their physical presence. A similarity between *The Unnamable* and Beckett's pieces for the theatre is evident, as Beckett's play *Not I* is effectively written into the novel:

that's the show, waiting for the show, to the sound of a murmur, you try and be  
reasonable, perhaps it's not a voice at all, perhaps it's the air... that's the show, free,

gratis, and for nothing, waiting alone, blind, deaf, you don't know where you don't know for what, for a hand to come and draw you away, somewhere else, where perhaps it's worse. (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 99)

*Not I*, if the director follows Beckett's stage directions, is to be performed on a stage in complete black-out, excepting one illuminated mouth.<sup>14</sup> The mouth speaks slightly quicker than the speed at which the audience may comfortably perceive the meaning of her words. The sensory experience of the viewer of *Not I* is thus defined by blindness and deafness as the theatre space and stage dialogue have been manipulated to promote disorientation. The viewer is likely to experience their own unique mixture of longing for the “hand to come” and draw them away from the entrapment of the drama, and transfixion in the face of the enigmatic image. The unnamable's description of “the show” is, in this regard, similar to “the show” as manifest in *Not I*. This passage functions as description, then, of an imagistic idea that is struggling to remain in verbal language, and is indicative of Beckett's struggle with the limitations of novel-as-form. The passage's evocation of the experience of a hypothetical viewer is similarly pertinent. The viewer's experience is described, effectively, as one of impossibility: “waiting alone, blind, deaf, you don't know where you don't know for what”. This is similar to Beckett and the unnamable's creative condition as evoked by Blanchot. Beckett has, through the unnamable's narration, drawn the reader into a similarly uncomfortable and impossible creative space, as it lacks coherency or familiarity. He has also, through the unreliability of his narrator, invited the reader into a dialogue with the subject matter of the novel. The reader is implicated in the novel's creativity, and learns the difficulty of attempting to create meaning in the face of impossible experience. Thus, the reader learns about Blanchot's “insomniac day”, through being made to *experience* Beckett's creative

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<sup>14</sup> It is pertinent to note that Beckett demanded that the exit signs of the theatre be blocked out for the production of *Not I*, so that the audience would feel as though they could not leave.



condition.

As well as speaking in an open voice, the unnamable responds to his perception of the impotence of language and the impossibility of his creative experience by experimenting with a humorous voice, as well as a panicked voice. The unnamable, despite his bleak experience of purposelessness, can be observed cracking jokes: “Yes, they gave me some lessons in pigsty Latin too, it looks well, sprinkled through the perjury” (42). Perjury is a willful false oath, and pigsty Latin is a pun on pig Latin: a half language that English persons use to codify their words. The intent of the sentence is serious, referring as it does to language as being purposefully duplicitous, yet the humour acts as distraction from the conceptual enormity of the failure of words. Humour also enters *The Unnamable* as well-crafted nonsense:

I must have been coming to the end of a world tour, perhaps not more than two or three centuries to go. My state of decay lends colour to this view, perhaps I had left my leg behind in the Pacific, yes, no perhaps about it, I had, somewhere off the coast of Java and its jungles red with rafflesia stinking of carrion, no that's the Indian Ocean, what a gazetteer I am. (29)

This story is full of word play, for example the sentence “yes, no perhaps about it”, where an often used group of words (yes, no, perhaps), all work together. In isolation, the clause makes no sense as it is effectively a set of contradictions, yet here the unnamable plays with the words to make a kind of sense, which, however, works to contribute to the overall nonsense of the story. In contrast, the unnamable's prose often dissolves into a panicked self destruction:

I don't know who it's all about, that's all I know, no I must know something else, they must have taught me something, it's about him who knows nothing, wants nothing, can do nothing... who cannot hear, cannot speak, who is I, who cannot be I, of whom I

can't speak, of whom I must speak. (123)

The unnamable, in this passage, is unable to find anything tangible to grasp, and takes to rambling in frightened contradictions. This reaction, along with the unnamable's joking in the face of the unknowable, functions as an exploration of the limitations of verbal language. Both reactions signal Beckett's preoccupation with the necessity of establishing an alternative means of expression in literature.

Deleuze describes Beckett's interrogation of verbal language as the “exhaustion” of language. In *The Unnamable*, Beckett makes frequent use of Deleuze's “language I”, where he exhausts language by running through combinatory possibilities:

I add this, to be on the safe side. These things I say, and shall say, if I can, are no longer, or are not yet, or never were, or never will be, or if they were, if they are, if they will be, were not here, are not here, will not be here, but elsewhere. But I am here. So I am obliged to add this. I who am here, who cannot speak, who cannot think, and who must speak, and therefore perhaps think a little. (11-12)

The unnamable's words seem here to act as a parody of description. His combinatorial voice attempts to give every possible disclaimer to speech. It attempts to cover all possible failings and to create speech that is stable and unable to be argued with. However, the effect of the combination seems entirely irrational. In addition, the obsessiveness of the unnamable's words appears to help calm the mind down rather than to communicate. Language, in this passage, has exhausted itself, as it carries on describing until it loses its power to describe: “words exist, they do exist, and the proper ones at that; but even though words are present and are used, they say nothing, they transmit nothing” (Carnero-Gonzalez, 205). The unnamable's “language I” enables the reader to perceive the problematic nature of verbal language.

Beckett's presentation of the meaninglessness of language necessarily demands discussion of his placement on the modernist and post-modernist spectrum. Begam defines Beckett as a post-modernist due to:

the incessant, relentless development of this language away from representation and referential clarity, toward that which may only be described in terms of what is “unthinkable” and “unspeakable.” (qtd in Hansen, 1041)

Kemp, too speaks of Beckett's “characteristically postmodern *denial of depth*” (Kemp, 183). I, however, posit that the overall aim or effect of Beckett's work is constructive rather than destructive as the purpose of the movement of language towards the “unspeakable” is to inspire the reader to incessantly question what they are presented with. Thus, the movement away from clear, representative language results in increasing the depth of possibility of meaning, rather than denying depth. The unnamable himself explores the extent of the meaninglessness of language, as he asks: “Would it not be better if I were simply to keep on saying babababa, for example, while waiting to ascertain the true function of this venerable organ?” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 19). In this passage, the unnamable repeats phrases in order to find what the language he uses means, and by extension, in order to find the purpose of the moving mouth. His sarcasm rules out total abstraction, as he proposes that “babababa” is a humorous rather than a serious solution to the question of language. In this single sentence, the unnamable's language is made to appear at once earnest and sarcastic, abstract and descriptive, but always curious and deeply involved in the questioning of itself. The deterioration of language is also shown to be constructive in Beckett's use of pompous and slightly cryptic language, as evidenced in the self-confidence of the narrator. This voice appears to be presented in opposition to the panicked narrator, or the open narrator, as explored earlier: “setting sun whose last rays, raking the street from end to end, lend to my

cenotaph an interminable shadow, astraddle of the gutter and the sidewalk” (53). Beckett here uses the word “cenotaph” in an unexpected way, as in referring to a monument erected for those whose remains are elsewhere, the narrator implies that as he speaks, he is not present. It is thus that the narrator's self-confident tone ceases to be convincing, and the sentence deconstructs itself. The unnamable, again, raises the idea that “I” is a fragile, rather than a coherent concept.

Beckett's unravelling of verbal language is also evident in the unnamable's recurrent obsession with saying the *right* thing in order to appease unnamed others, and his hope that the need to speak at all may be removed: “One starts speaking as if it were possible to stop at will. It is better so. The search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue” (10). This statement shows that the urge to stop speech is continually countered by the need to continue speech, as the unnamable later notes explicitly: “I do just enough to preserve me from going silent” (17). The unnamable's conception of verbal language appears to have become problematic, as it functions to fill the silence, yet he also perceives it to have the power to deliver silence, once all possibilities have been exhausted and the “true” words spoken. The right word, however, will never be spoken, because language does not have the power to end language. Additionally, speaking does not necessarily “preserve [the unnamable] from going silent”, because, as has been observed, words do not necessarily communicate what they are given to communicate. Thus, the unnamable is effectively “silent” as he cannot be sure that his words are perceived in the same way that he perceives them. This idea, in turn, relates to Beckett's creative space in that it evokes his feeling that expression is impossible, as well as evoking the, apparently contradictory, imperative to express: “The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation

to express” (Beckett, *Proust*, 103).

Beckett, in his exploration at the edge of language, draws into question the objectivity of words, and their ability to communicate ideas between human beings. This critique is pertinent in that it provides the necessary theoretical basis for Beckett's experimentation with modes of expression that focus on visual rather than verbal language. The unnamable, for example, describes his disconnection from his own vocabulary: “they were on lists, the images opposite, I must have forgotten them, I must have mixed them up, these nameless images I have, these imageless names... blank words, but I use them. They keep coming back” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 127). Here, the unnamable has forgotten what his words describe, as words and images have become disassociated. Thus, the apparently natural connection between one's understanding of objects and their corresponding vocabulary, appears questionable. Visual language, however, retains a vital connection to one's experience with objects as both object and its visual representation are understood through the perception of sensory information. The process of sight, then, links the object to its expressed form. Verbal language, on the other hand, may only ever boast an abstracted relationship to the actual, and is thus further removed from one's sensory understanding. However, the unnamable knows that this verbal language is his only language, and that he must express, though expression is impossible: “blank words, but I use them. They keep coming back”.

It is important to note that whilst Beckett works to exhaust the possibilities of language through the techniques discussed above, through processes which may broadly be classified as Deleuze's “language I”, Deleuze himself discusses *The Unnamable* in terms of “language II”. Language cannot simply be tired out in order to reach its end, it must be exhausted: “The tired can no longer realize, but the exhausted can no longer possibilite” (Deleuze, 3). It is thus that “language I” must be exhausted in order to reach “language II” and

this must be done in a creative space that reads as remarkably similar to Blanchot's, as discussed earlier: "only the exhausted can exhaust the possible, because he has renounced all need, preference, goal or signification" (4). "language II" is the language of voices, and in order to exhaust "language II" one must attempt to silence all voices. As has been observed, the unnamable is particularly concerned with the idea of silence. Deleuze, however, specifically describes the concept of voice as language in "blendable flows" (7). I posit that "language II" demands a focus on the basic sensory quality of spoken words when compared to written words, whereas *The Unnamable* primarily focuses its struggle on the description of voices. The unnamable as narrator is embroiled in a struggle of the naming of things, and while this is indicative of his concern with the silencing of voices, the novel is still linguistically focused. This distinction becomes clear if we compare *The Unnamable* with *Not I*. The latter, as discussed earlier, is effectively written into the former text. *The Unnamable*, then, works to describe in verbal language what is later realised as an image in its own right. In *Not I*, the audience is only able to catch snatches of phrases amongst the outpouring of speech. Notably, the repeated "what?... who?... no!... she!", wherever the mouth reaches a stage of her monologue where she needs to say "I", is comprehensible due to the pauses enforced by ellipses (Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, 377). The struggle with the concept of the unnamable's own voice and with other voices, then, becomes embodied in *Not I*. In the play, the denial of "I" becomes a tangible pause as, after uttering "she!", the mouth clamps shut. The unnamable's concern with the nature of "I" has lead Kemp to conclude that "The book is about the question what does it mean to say I", which, while overstating the issue, does bring the parallel with *Not I* into sharp focus (Kemp, 178). The first sentence of *The Unnamable* is "Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call

that on” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 1). In this, the unnamable evokes the concept of “I”, and questions the dimensions of his own voice, as Begam describes:

In one sense, the two I's in this sentence are identical, referring, as they presumably do, to a single and unitary subject. Yet in another sense, these two I's are not merely different but antithetical, since one functions as a subject and the other as an object; or, to shift our terms slightly, since one functions as a narrator and the other as a narrated. (Begam, 877)

“I”, then, becomes part of Beckett's language critique in *The Unnamable*. The word is particularly indicative of the insufficiency of verbal language, as it is the word used to demarcate one's ego from the ego of others, yet: “The state of the subject as it is for the subject—is *objectively* nothing but what it is *subjectively*. It is nothing but what it seems” (Kemp, 167). The experience of one's ego is isolated, and effectively, impossible to share through language. The unnamable is able to say “I”, but is not necessarily communicating the sense of his own ego, as there are many possible meanings for the expressed “I”, and the unnamable himself is “unbelieving” of its efficacy as a word. The unnamable's voice is not consistent, thus, “I” refers to many “I's” rather than a stable sense of self. Beckett's exploration of the inexpressibility of “I” in *The Unnamable*, then, is important groundwork for later pieces. To once again take *Not I* for an example, inexpressibility of ego becomes manifest in the image of a shut mouth, and its accompanying silence.

### *Making clear the unclear*

The idea that inexpressibility is of import in the novel is supported by the title *The Unnamable*, which does not simply indicate that Beckett prefers to leave the novel without a name, as Begam describes: “if it is unnamable [innommable], it is not provisionally so, not

because our language has not yet found or received this name, or because we would have to seek it in another language... it is rather because there is no name for it at all” (Begam, 875). Beckett's language, then, does not function as a riddle, but rather is ambiguous because it could not honestly be any other way. The unnamable, in one of his first stories tells us: “Oh look, there is the first thing, Malone's hat. I see no other clothes. Perhaps Molloy is not here at all” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 2-3). Here, the unnamable focuses on the specific detail of Malone's hat. By focusing on the hat, however, the unnamable fails to see any other clothes, and confuses himself by first admitting that perhaps the character is not there, and then further by mixing up the characters: Malone has become Molloy who is not there. The unnamable tells the reader that he sees the hat, and thereby provides concrete evidence for the reader, yet this apparent clarity makes the consequent unravelling of sense all the more unnerving. The purpose of clear details is not to add to the overall plausibility of the story, but rather to make clear how unclear the story really is. Here, the hat is emptied of its communicative coherency, and language unravels into infinite possibility. Beckett's use of concrete language, in this instance, is far more effective than if he had begun in abstract language, as the latter is naturally understood to be subjective and to evoke a wide range of meaning, whereas concrete language draws the contrast between clearness and unclearness into sharp relief. Roland Barthes has urged the reader to “discover language from the point of view of emergent, 'speaking' speech, rather than as 'spoken', instituted language” (Iversen, 334). Beckett's work may be seen to unravel “instituted language”, and to bring the reader and the unnamable into an understanding that all aspects of language are disputable. Thus, in *The Unnamable*, verbal language is re-purposed, and rather than remaining static, emerges consistently in new forms. The unnamable's words may thus be considered to be examples of Barthes' “‘speaking' speech”.



Beckett's making clear of the unclear is also evidenced in the word "silence", which is clearly an incongruous word because it works to break silence; it is a word to denote a lack of words. In effect, silence is an anti-onomatopoeic word as the sound of silence is incompatible with its language sign. In regards to *The Unnamable*, silence is notably present, in fact Carnero-Gonzalez has said that "*The Unnamable* is not only a search for silence... as the speaking "I" seems to desire on numerous occasions. Rather, *The Unnamable* is silence itself", by which he means that the definitions of language and silence in the novel are so fraught that they are held in tense contradiction (Carnero-Gonzalez, 205). In effect, then, the word "silence" is as silent as the word "I", in that it is unable to express what it is given to mean. The incongruity of the word is mirrored by the unnamable's attitude towards silence, as at times it is desired: "It will be a start, a step towards the silence and the end of madness, the madness of having to speak and not being able to", and later feared: "They think I can't bear silence, that someday, somehow, my horror of silence will force me to break it" (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 36 and 62). The reader is continually presented with the unnamable's struggle with inexpressibility, as his prose is negated as it is written. The unreliable nature of language, then, becomes the unnamable's preoccupation. Rather than focusing on character or plot development, the narrator focuses on the act of writing, and the impossibility of that act. This suggests that Beckett's frustration with language is central rather than tangential, and it from this vantage point that it becomes imperative to explore other modes of expression.

### *Sensory language and onomatopoeia*

In *The Unnamable*, Beckett may be observed to move beyond language critique and into an exploration of language's possibility as an expressive tool. Beckett's onomatopoeia, for example, focuses on the sounds of words, and how language may function aside from flawed

description. Onomatopoeia functions to make “the sound of words and phrases... *opaque*”, which, in turn, means that the reader's understanding of words is inextricably connected to their sound as well as their descriptive meaning (Bredin, 557). Hugh Bredin refers to the idea that the vast majority of word sounds are understood semiotically, where sound functions simply to make words that, in turn, communicate: “that is, we can grasp the meaning of a word or phrase without consciously adverting to, or subsequently remembering, its sound” (557). Onomatopoeic words, on the other hand, work to disrupt this process, and the link between sound and interpretation of that sound becomes more problematic. When presented with onomatopoeic words, the reader must consider acoustic information more closely, as sound has its own autonomous meaning. As a result, onomatopoeic terms are less easily assimilated according to a habitual semiotic schema, and the reader's interpretation necessarily slows. Robbie Goh observes that “onomatopoeic items... entice the reader's participation in an alternative semiotics in which the sign refers... via its own palpability to corresponding qualities in the physical consistency, properties, and kinetics of things” (Goh, 271). By adding more sensory information to words in the form of emphasised sound, the reader's understanding of language is affected by non-verbal stimuli. Though onomatopoeia acts in an “opaque” way, as increased sensory information slows perception of sound meaning, that language has increased communicative power, as it relates intimately and directly with the reader's senses.

An example of Beckett's onomatopoeia can be found when the unnamable says: “But it is the black as with the grey, the black proves nothing either, as to the nature of the silence which it inspissates” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 81). The word “inspissates” is notable as a word sound due to its quadruple use of the “s” sound, and, rather than encouraging the reader to jump straight to dictionary meanings, it encourages analysis of the word's sensory

information. Beckett makes this onomatopoeia more effective through disruption of word association, as the word is present outside of its usual sensory usage. “Inspissates” means “thickening”, which refers to tactile sensation rather than the aural and visual senses presented by the word's context of “silence”, “black” and “grey”. Thus, the opacity of the word works at the level of the what said, as the word appears out of context, and at the level of the way said, in that it functions onomatopoeically. One's basic reading must, on account of this opacity, be based on its sound. Instinctually, my reading associates the word with infiltration of some kind, as I visualise blackness moving in to fill up silence. The word's “s” sounds spread, which means that the word, aurally speaking, fills silence to a greater extent than would hard consonant sounds such as “t” that function to clip words closed. The way said, according to my subjective impression, but also according to the basic properties of the word, implies colour filling up sound. In turn, the what said, in relation to the word's definition and its placement out of context, promotes the idea that black thickens silence, and, in addition, promotes onomatopoeic sensory blurring as it adds tactility to the word's aural and visual properties. To take another example:

This grey to begin with, meant to be depressing no doubt. And yet there is yellow in it, pink too apparently, it's a nice grey, of the kind recommended as going with everything, urinous and warm.... A man would wonder where his kingdom ended, his eye strive to penetrate the gloom... and perhaps even regret being a man. (76)

I argue that the words urinous and warm are onomatopoeic as their sounds evoke an all-encompassing, saturated fluidity. This impression is contributed to by the what said of the words, that is, the warm drenching associated with the loss of control over one's bladder. The onomatopoeic effect is gained due to the “s” sounds in “urinous”, which evoke a fluid slowness, and due to “warm” being a word which sounds beyond its monosyllabic boundaries.

I refer to the idea here that “warm” is similar to “hum”, and thus necessarily promotes an indeterminate termination of the word in aural space. These sound-impressions relate to the ambiguity of the colour grey, as it is the ultimate non-colour, stretching indeterminately in shades between concrete black and white. Beckett, in his sensory language experiments, may be considered to be constructing solutions to issues raised in his critique of verbal language, as he allows that language to communicate in alternative ways. This constructive response to the exhaustion of language indicates that Beckett's language critique may not be considered nihilistic, as Duncan McColl Chesney describes:

Beckett does not want to destroy art for the sake of a new life, or cynically, out of some nihilist gesture.... Rather, following Theodor Adorno, I would say that Beckett wants to use the utmost ability and knowledge of tradition to continue to create art in a shattered world in which none of the “old answers” remains valid. (McColl Chesney, 649)

Beckett's grey, as expressed through the use of an onomatopoeia that works to blur words into a fluid and indeterminate sound, is indicative of a “shattered world” with no boundaries, while also being indicative of the need to “continue to create art”. Beckett's onomatopoeia is doubly powerful as it is supported by the content of the words, as the grey is presented as being both depressing and “a nice grey”, and is thus ambiguous. Similarly, the compulsion to continue to create art is present as the man's “eye[s] strive[s] to penetrate the gloom”, despite the fact that this activity may perhaps make him “regret being a man”. Here, sensory information works with literary information and with contextual information (the concept of nihilism) to create a multi-layered impression. I will admit here that this interpretation is far too neat, as the words and word-sounds have many other possible meanings, but assert that this interpretation strives merely to illustrate a particular aspect of the work that is pertinent to the overall argument,

that being the depth of ambiguity. Similarly, this conception of onomatopoeia seeks to illustrate the importance of Beckett's word sounds, in how they relate to his project of tangibility in language.

Thus far, I have worked to establish a link between Beckett's onomatopoeia and the reader's sensory experience of the novel. In light of this, it is important to establish a link between the sensory experience and the novel's visuality. As observed, Goh notes the physicality of onomatopoeic words and describes how they promote understanding of realities outside of a habitual understanding of their literal meaning. This relates to the way in which visual arts are experienced, as they present meaning by directly implicating the viewer's sensory capacities. "literary content" is present in visual art, yet this is always deeply entwined with its sensory meaning, as Nick Zangwill describes:

pictorial meaning and literary content... do not depend on specific sensory properties.... The aesthetic value of pictorial representations and some aspects of literature depends on their precise sensory manifestation, but the aesthetic value of pictorial meaning and literary content does not. (Zangwill, 74)

Zangwill here, in his use of the term "pictorial meaning" evokes the literary elements of painting, i.e. "a dove's symbolizing peace" (72). In this article, Zangwill distinguishes between meaning gathered through the senses and meaning gathered through verbal language techniques such as symbolism. Zangwill describes how the nature of literature means that it is, largely, not "experienced", and how the nature of painting means that it largely is. The exception in literature is the "sonic properties" of the language, which are experienced aesthetically by the reader (73). Beckett's onomatopoeia focuses on the sonic properties of language, and he utilises these sonic properties to enable the reader to intuit the ambiguity of verbal language. Whilst this does not make him a painter, it shows a sensibility that is

sympathetic to that of visual artists, who work to express themselves largely through sensory means.

Beckett's use of silence also contributes to the sensory language of the novel, as it gives importance to the spaces between words. Beckett's pauses enable him to orchestrate his words, as Edward Albee describes: "The most important thing to know about Beckett as a playwright is that he was not only a playwright; he was a composer.... Beckett could know the difference between a two second silence and a three second silence and he was absolutely right" (Oppenheim, *I'll Go On*, 10:33). The unnamable's use of silence to orchestrate the rhythm of his sentences is evident in the following passage:

Silence, yes, but what silence! For it is all very fine to keep silence, but one has also to consider the kind of silence one keeps. I listened. One might as well speak and be done with it. What liberty! I strained my ear towards what must have been my voice still, so weak, so far, that it was like the sea, a far calm sea dying – no, none of that, no beach, no shore, the sea is enough, I've had enough of shingle, enough of sand, enough of earth, enough of sea too. (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 19-20)

The beginning of this passage is bouncy and bright, with two small pauses followed by an exclamation mark. Silence works to create an upbeat, staccato rhythm in these small pauses. The exclamation mark is more final and creates a longer pause which is appropriate for the transition into a mode of inquiry: "For it is all very fine to keep silence". The exclamation mark also works as a stroke of vocal energy which carries well into the joke: "one has to consider the kind of silence one keeps". The sentence itself, phonetically, may be considered to be "legato", as there is no remarkable break in the flow of words.<sup>15</sup> The passage of legato is followed by a full stop, which marks a long silence, and, in turn, slows the reader down. The

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<sup>15</sup> The Harvard Dictionary of Music describes this term as "Played smoothly with no separation between successive notes" (Randel, 459).

juxtaposition of this silence with a short, serious sentence: “I listened”, functions as an unexpected contrast, which changes the tone of the piece completely. The change in tone, coupled with the change in sentence structure draws the what said into focus, and the reader, in turn, must listen. What said also complements way said in that the content of the previous sentence is of silence, thus the instruction to the reader is to listen to the silence, and the phonetic instruction is: Staccato! Legato. Stop. The contrast between sound and silence is implicit in the way said of the sentence, and thus the reader gains knowledge through the experience of the words as well as through the words themselves. The last sentence in the passage may be also be described as legato, as it is an extended sentence, which is broken by semi-regular commas into short phrases. These commas, rather than acting as beats or stops, act almost as “tonguing” or “bowing” does on wind or bowed instruments, and are consistent with the Harvard Dictionary's definition, where “the term itself does not necessarily imply the absence of articulation, but only a very smooth articulation” (Randel, 459). The “smooth articulation” of the sentence is contributed to by the soft “f” and “s” sounds that are repeated: “enough of sand, enough of shingle”. These sounds prevent the sentence being broken by vocal stops. If one considers the content of the words at the surface level, the sentence is about the unnamable being sick of the sea. On a sensory level, the phonetics of the sentence may be described as wave-like, as they ebb and flow continuously, taking small breaths between. In addition, the unnamable, in straining to hear his own voice, uses a metaphor that becomes preposterous to him: “a far calm sea dying”, followed by the repetitious use of “no” and “enough”. It is thus that the discussion of sound and silence continues, as the unnamable listens to his barely audible voice that he has silenced: “One might as well speak and be done with it”. The unnamable then fills the silence with metaphors, which he finds impotent, and then attempts to silence these through negation. Phonetically, the soft legato sound,

punctuated with small breaths or silences, is indicative of the frequency of silence, and at once, of the impossibility of stopping words moving for time enough to allow silence to assert itself. Here, way said and what said are inextricably merged as the reader gains information aurally as well as through their reading of the meaning of words. The passage utilises the sensory elements of language to communicate an experience of sounds and silence to the reader, as the reader engages with these concepts through Beckett's orchestration, rather than engaging with them solely as indirect and imprecise word-definitions.

In addition to Beckett's use of way said, as observed in the passage above, Beckett's evocation of the colour grey may also be considered a contributing factor to the sensory impression of the novel. In *The Unnamable*, the reader is continually presented with greyness, and, while the unnamable's attitude towards it changes much in the way his attitude to silence changes, the consistency of its appearance means that the reader's impression of the novel becomes coloured by greyness:

Whether all grow black, or all grow bright, or all remain grey, it is grey we need, to begin with, because of what it is, and of what it can do, made of bright and black, able to shed the former of the latter, and be the latter or former alone. But perhaps I am the prey, on the subject of grey, in the grey, to delusions. (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 11)

While grey is not presented as an image in its own right, Beckett is concerned here with the exploration of it as subject matter. Later, when Beckett creates images for the stage, greyness becomes part of the nature of the imagery, as Garner Jr. describes: “pulls of illumination and extinguishment make themselves felt, Beckett's '[h]ellish half-light' is light divided within itself” (Garner Jr., 356). Garner Jr. also describes how Beckett's muted light changes the nature of theatrical space:

For example, diminished light reduces audience perception of depth by muting the



articulation of image and the visual contrast essential to distance. Also, the absence of any visual backdrop that might serve as a reference point to gauge the extent (and even the direction) of depth gives the darkness surrounding and separating his visual objects a quality of “depthless space” and gives the objects and figures themselves the eerie effect of floating in an expanse outside measurement. (362)

The unnamable's consistent mentioning of the grey works to exhaust Deleuze's “language I”, as it works to exhaust the possibility of grey as language, so that he may, eventually, release greyness as imagery. *The Unnamable*, in itself may perhaps be considered to be visually powerful as it never relaxes; its language is continually hovering close to the limits of expression. Deleuze, as has been discussed, defines imagery through its “internal tension” rather than by its adherence to a specific form. Language, such as Beckett's, that is so removed from everyday expression is perhaps uniquely able to break the boundary presented by the novel-as-form. The text may, as it extends to the outer limits of textuality, be seen to reach into non-textual forms of expression. The overall experience of the novel, for example, may be described as a man in the half-dark, interjecting the silence with his frightened, confused prose. While this is not a non-textual image in itself, the way the novel is almost defined by words that relate to the senses, such as “grey” and “silence”, means that the text leaves the reader with the demand to make the text visual in their mind's eye. The ability of Beckett's work to leave such strong imagistic impressions becomes more pronounced as he moves into theatre. In *Not I*, for example, as has been discussed, the viewer is left with the image of a mouth, blurred from speed into a slack-jawed image of speechlessness. Similarly, *Footfalls* becomes, essentially, a woman pacing, and *Rockaby* a woman rocking. Actress Billie Whitelaw, who has performed in all three plays, speaks of her experience of being directed by Beckett in *Footfalls* in notably image-oriented terms: “I felt I was being painted

with light” (Gussow, 101-2). For Whitelaw, Beckett's art is primarily one of image creation. These plays work to painterly effect at least partly because of the focused and repetitious use of small movements, be that the image of a moving, speaking mouth, of moving feet, or of moving back and forth in a rocking chair. In *The Unnamable*, the protagonist's obsessive reiteration of silence and greyness contributes to its ability to leave the viewer with such a strong sensory impression.

### *Space creation and phenomenology*

Beckett, in *The Unnamable*, is as focused on the what said as he is on the way said of language. At this stage, then, Beckett is exploring sensory language from his position at the edge of verbal language. This project, in addition, necessarily begins to struggle at the edges of form, due to the novel's limited capacity for expression of tangible and sensory-based elements. This was a concern of other writers working in France at the time of *The Unnamable*'s publication, as Claude Mauriac explains:

In literature as in painting the anecdote has little value. We are no longer telling a story but depicting a world, our own world. If at times our work becomes too abstract it is because in attempting to express as exactly as possible what reality means to us we must reproduce the distortions and the different forms that appear to us. (Mauriac, BR5)

Here, the sensibility of writers is described as moving away from simple story-telling, and towards the creation of spaces and consideration of physical form. Mauriac's statement implies that literature lags behind painting, a sentiment which is also expressed by Beckett in his famous quote from a letter to Axel Kaun:

To bore one hole after another in [language], until what lurks behind it – be it

something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today. Or is literature alone to remain behind in the old lazy ways that have been so long ago abandoned by music and painting? (Beckett, *Disjecta*, 172)

In *The Unnamable*, Beckett's attempts to create spaces act in a similar way to his exploration of onomatopoeia, in that they enable him to access the “non-literary” elements of language. Space creation also relates to Beckett's position at the edge of language, where he must continue to write despite the apparent impossibility of doing so. The unnamable as narrator must, in turn, create walls, however small, within his own vast unknown: “a ball, revolving one knows not how about one knows not what, about him, every two years, every three years” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 78). Due to the narrator's unreliability, the sentence is inherently unstable, yet one concrete aspect remains. The how, the when, the where, the why are unknowns, but the what: a ball, revolving, is allowed to remain. It is as though this image is given further weight as all that surrounds it fails to remain coherent. The overall impression is of an enigmatic space where things happen without due cause. The sliver of unnegated prose is able, through its explanation of space, to evoke the stubborn unnamability of that space. The unnamable's description of the revolving ball is also pertinent in that its orbit is unpredictable, and thus has an unnerving, rather than a calming, effect on the eye. This aligns the passage with Stanton B. Garner Jr.'s description of the “off-center” in Beckett's work:

this movement “off-center” represents a pressing visual symbol of the decenteredness of Beckett's dramatic world and the figures who inhabit it: marginalized within time and space, disjointed from the gestures they make and the stories they tell, consigned to an unending linguistic evasion, as they elude the centering subjectivity of “I”... Off-center objects are characterized, in other words, by the forces of approach and withdrawal, surrender and escape, and they establish fields of strong visual instability.

(Garner Jr., 364-5)

Garner Jr. here shows how Beckett's creation of “off-center” spaces reflects the state of his characters and his dramatic world, as these spaces work to establish “visual instability”, and thus the instability of the whole. However, the unnamable's description of the revolving ball works to refute Garner Jr.'s assertion that Beckett's characters are “consigned to an unending linguistic evasion”, as while verbal language is largely negated, the “off-center” space is offered as concrete information, and, significantly, it is offered in verbal language. In addition, while “I” has been dislocated, an “I” does produce speech. Linguistics in the novel are not evaded, as the reader accumulates scraps of knowledge through reading and appraising verbal language. A description of the overall impression of the novel, then, would not seek to explain what the novel was about or describe its plot; rather it would describe the aesthetic impression of the whole. This is evidenced in a survey of descriptions of *The Unnamable* in scholarly articles on the subject: Mihaela P. Harper summarises the novel as an impression of “a vital instability” (Harper, 151). Carnero-Gonzalez describes it as “silence and silence” and Dina Sherzer characterizes it as “excess, heterogeneity, and a sense of urgency” (Carnero-Gonzalez, 205 and Sherzer, 89). *The Unnamable* is not about a “vital instability”, rather it is, vitally, unstable; it is not about silence or urgency or heterogeneity or excess, it exists as all these things.

Beckett, in order to give such an impression, is actively writing away from “literary content”, and towards “sensory manifestation” (Zangwill, 74). The sensory is, as discussed, expressed through onomatopoeia and the creation of spaces. The philosophy of phenomenology proves useful in establishing this link between the sensory focus of Beckett's writing and the impression of the novel as expressed by Beckett scholars. Phenomenologists profess that successful sensory painting depends on the ability of the viewer to “experience”

what is depicted and to be engaged in the work, as a person who is walking down the stairs must be engaged in their task. Beckett's text is phenomenologically powerful because he uses his words in an attempt to engage the reader's sensory faculties. In turn, the reader may experience the "phenomenon" of the novel, rather than understanding it in from an intellectual distance. Beckett also writes a narrator who is engaged in his own creativity (as is the man in Chardin's painting), but who, vitally, is unreliable. There is no suspension of disbelief in *The Unnamable*; instead the reader is in argument with the narrator, and is working with the narrator to create meaning. The particular openness of the text, and the expressed instability of language creates a space in which the reader is welcome, is indeed, required to provide any sense of clarity. The reader, then, is engaged in his/her own creativity in reading the novel, and is involved in the work phenomenologically. The reader experiences the unnamable's struggle at the limitations of language, rather than understanding through explanation of those limitations.

### *Disintegration*

Structurally, the foundations of the narrative in *The Unnamable* are as uncertain as verbal language. The unnamable tells stories, but always returns to the admission that he does not know what he is talking about. It is thus that uncertainty becomes its own kind of certainty, as well as the central axis of the novel. Progressively, the unnamable abandons stories and his talk becomes more insular. The presumption of coming silence, for example, begins in earnest twenty pages before the end of the novel, and little outside of the speaking self is considered: "I'm going silent, there's going to be silence" (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 111). Later, the statement is directly refuted: "As to believing I shall go silent for good and all, I don't believe it particularly, I always believed it, as I always believed I would never go silent, you can't call

that believing, it's my walls" (115). Begam describes the structure of *The Unnamable* in visual terms:

Beckett's novel presents itself not as an unambiguous movement from one thing to another, a simple accession to unnamability, but rather as a series of dissolving images, fade-ins and fade-outs, which have the effect of gradually, almost imperceptibly, shifting our frame of reference. (Begam, 881)

Thus, the novel does not progress in a linear fashion, rather, it continually dissolves. While the narrative focus shifts over the course of the novel as it moves further into the unnamable's head, the same uncertainty remains as words are written only to be negated. Laura Barge has noted that:

the high degree of formal structure and stylization of nearly all of the earlier works (e.g., *Endgame* and *Molloy*) makes highly suspect any suggestion that Beckett is out to destroy literary form in these later pieces. It is far more likely that he is creating forms that are innovative and unique. (Barge, 273)

Thus, while prose is continually negated, this does not mean that Beckett is attempting to create something that means nothing, rather he is creating something so uncertain that the reader must question each conclusion as soon as it is reached. Nothingness, then, appears as an openness that invites the reader into discussion with the text. The unnamable tells the reader that:

impossible situations cannot be prolonged, unduly, the fact is well known, either they disperse, or they turn out to be possible after all, it's only to be expected, not to mention other possibilities. Let there be light, it will not necessarily be disastrous. Or let there be none, we'll manage without it. (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 77)

This passage indicates the way in which the text promotes possibility through its destruction

of solidarity and linearity of narrative. The reader is told that impossibility is a temporary state, as impossible situations either cease or are resolved. Later, the unnamable states that this is only one possibility for understanding the impossible. Subsequently, ideas of revelation and creation are evoked as he says “Let there be light”, and then destroys the coherency of that revelation by revealing it to be only one inadequate option amongst many possibilities. Here, negation is clearly the creation of myriad meaning, rather than being the destruction of meaning.

The concept of disintegration may also be applied to structure of the novel. As each of the unnamable's stories are negated, the novel, as a whole, moves backwards and forwards in equal measure. As a whole, then, the novel oscillates around a point, rather than moving forward. The novel is restricted at the edges, much as a picture is restricted by its frame, and a mind by its skull. This tendency, towards the closing in of space, albeit the abstract space presented in prose, reflects Beckett's concern, at the time of writing *The Unnamable* and *Waiting for Godot* of creating tangibility in his work. The unnamable expresses these concerns as he confesses to the reader: “I don't know where I end” (59). This concern is important because it is indicative of Beckett's frustration with the novel-as-form, and guides his transition into the concreteness of theatre: “Theatre is... initially a relief/rest from the work of the novel” as “[o]ne is dealing with a specific space, and with human beings in this space” (Gendron, 96). Beckett describes his own work as “complete disintegration. No 'I', no 'have', no 'being'. No nominative, no accusative, no verb. There's no way to go on” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, xvii). This “disintegration”, and the subsequent impossibility of moving on, articulates Beckett's concerns with regards to the novel, which is, effectively in free-fall. Theatre, on the other hand, offers physical space and physical bodies. However, I argue that the extreme point of Beckett's disintegration, as well as articulating the problem of the novel,

is also descriptive of his solution. As has been observed, the unnamable consistently negates his prose, which leads to extreme absence, but also leads to narrative stasis. This stasis creates its own presence, as it restricts the movement of the narrative, and draws it into a contained space. Beckett's "space" is not necessarily four square walls with fixed dimensions, as Enoch Brater illuminates in his discussion of *All that Fall* (1957), a play for radio:

For the direction of movement on Beckett's stage depends not necessarily on left and right, but on the particular vantage point from which it is being perceived. Maddy Rooney's heavy movement is, for example, not seen at all, merely heard: she is a figure in a radio play "written to come out of the dark." (Brater, "A Footnote to 'Footfalls'", 36)

Beckett, in *Footfalls* utilises restricted space, which, in turn, becomes essential to the stage action: "the seemingly endless pacing... on the narrow strip of space suddenly illuminated before our eyes" (35). The restricted space as presented in *The Unnamable* is created by the "endless pacing" of the unnamable's narrative. In turn, that space becomes essential to the unnamable's pacing because the walls demand that pacing continues. The nature of this space has physicality, despite the fact that it is written rather than performed. The monologic nature of the unnamable's narration means that it is particularly effective at creating tangible space.

Peter Gidal, in his discussion of *Not I* describes the particular power of monologue:

The internal verbal repetitions and replications and the monotone persistence and extreme speed approaching indecipherability create the structure in time *and* force the dialectic on the viewer. The monologue as a form is perfectly situated in theatre and in writing for its structural concerns because of the basic singular unit, the speaker (or thinker).... A last aspect: obsessive repetition is not an image of mental claustrophobia, it is it. (Gidal, 310)



The unnamable rocks and paces between arguments, as do the women in *Rockaby* and *Footfalls*, and he engages in verbal loops as presented in the stage image of *Not I*. The language in *The Unnamable* aspires to these images and, in its creation of restricted space through the narrator's own monologue, is able to transcend the form of the novel. The key phenomenological point here, is Gidal's "last aspect", as he describes how repetition becomes "mental claustrophobia", rather than being representative of it. In this way, repetition becomes like Chardin's man blowing soap bubbles, that is, a depiction of engaged activity that demands engaged perception.

#### *A philosophy of uncertainty*

The disintegration of the unnamable's narratives may be considered as part of a wider project of uncertainty. Acknowledgement of this uncertainty is crucial to the task of criticism of Beckett's work, as Laura Barge duly notes: "Good criticism about literature such as Beckett's would have to be in one sense an acknowledgment of failure, an admission that incompleteness and ambiguity are of the nature of things" (Barge, 273). This statement is supported by Beckett's own assertion that we must not look for definitive answers in his work, for he certainly has not put them there: "When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right, I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that is simply a mess" (qtd in Kemp, 166-7). While it is important to not reduce Beckett's art to a singular meaning, it must also be recognised that parts of Beckett's writing are indeed didactic and logical, as Beckett's works have form and their own truths, even if they are outwardly messy, as Kemp warns:

Beckett's drive towards new literary and dramatic forms is a drive towards new models of the self – not merely a less tendentious or less factually incorrect

understanding of what it is to exist, but a clearer one, that will not generate unsatisfiable or incoherent aspirations. (Kemp, 168)

Thus, Beckett's works engage in a project that seeks to create new understandings of philosophical and literary issues. Crucially, Beckett's project results in a new understanding of uncertainty, as he makes art that consistently defies reason, which in turn, becomes its reason. This state has been described by Critchley as "Aporetic descriptions of aporia"; bewildered descriptions created to alleviate bewilderment, but only, in the end, evoking that bewilderment (Critchley, 195). This position, at the limit of expression, brings this analysis back to Beckett's creative condition, where speechlessness is inevitable, but one must "go on" regardless. The unnamable's inconsistent voice becomes an expression of the aporetic nature of Beckett's creative space. It moves from expressing aporia through the appropriation of Shakespeare's words: "Lacerating my sky with harmless fires and assaulting me with noises signifying nothing", to making jokes about the condition of speechlessness: "To tell the truth, let us be honest at least, it is some considerable time now since I last knew what I was talking about. It is because my thoughts are elsewhere. I am therefore forgiven. So long as one's thoughts are somewhere everything is permitted" (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 65 and 35). The unnamable also expresses aporia through creation and negation: "These lights gleaming low afar, then rearing up in a blaze and sweeping down upon me, blinding, to devour me, are merely one example", and then through serious description of the frightening nature of the aporetic experience: "What I hear is not the innocent and necessary sound of dumb things constrained to endure, but the terror-stricken babble of the condemned to silence" (65 and 69). The expected narrative hierarchy is thus disrupted. Rather than acting to give his protagonist a consistent voice in order so that they may consistently describe a string of events, Beckett writes uncertainty. Aporia, then, becomes *The Unnamable's* what said, as well as, through the

fragmentation of the speaking voice, the subject for its way said. It is thus that Beckett effectively writes the process of the splintering of a voice.

In addition to the inconsistency of the unnamable's voice, Beckett evokes a philosophy of uncertainty in his presentation of moments that cause complete confusion, wherein “the reader is reduced to asking that most embarrassing of all questions: what, literally, has happened?” (Begam, 880). In the first sentence of *The Unnamable*, for example, the narrator says: “Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 1). Here, one may guess at the statement's meaning, as I have done in my discussion of “The facets of the unnamable's voice”, but one must also note that it means much more, and much less than what I have decided it means. In the opening sentence, the “I”s play off one another to make the sentence defiantly irreconcilable. This moment functions to make the reader acknowledge that s/he has no idea who the “I” is, let alone what the “I” means. This matter is not resolved through the novel. The nature of “I” remains as baffling in a retrospective reading of that sentence as it was the first time. Beckett works, then, are concerned with unfixed ideas, and work to redefine didacticism. In this case, the presentation of the “I” has a new meaning “insofar as it teaches one to become aware of the perception of process and discourages 'logical' construction or alleged reconstruction of 'reality'” (Fischer-Seidel, 69). Beckett logically denies logic; his philosophy works to prevent philosophy that hopes to order the world, as Beckett's characters inhabit an unnamable space that cannot possibly be defined. As the unnamable says: “It's like shit, there we have it at last, there it is at last, the right word”, thus taking a low swipe at those who work to reduce the presented mess to theory (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 81).

This philosophy of uncertainty works to open up the text to reader, and to engage them in the creative space. In turn, the reader is made to experience the novel phenomenologically.

The reader is directly involved in perceptive acts in their engagement with the novel. Despite the strength of this experiential link, *The Unnamable* primarily discusses the nature of perception from within verbal language. The unnamable, for example, muses:

This eye, curious how this eye invites inspection, demands sympathy, solicits attention, implores assistance, to do what, it's not clear, to stop weeping, have a quick look around, goggle an instant and close forever. It's it you see and it alone, it's from it you set out to look for a face, to it you return having found nothing, nothing worth having, nothing but a kind of ashen smear. (91)

In this passage, visual perception becomes the subject matter of Beckett's text. Perception is evoked by the unnamable's act of seeing, which takes as its subject the act of seeing as represented by an eye. Perception here demands the attention of the unnamable, as well as, in response, the activity of the unnamable. In order to understand the eye, the unnamable must utilise his own sensory capacities. Crucially, however, engagement of the visual sense does not reduce ambiguity, as perception here leads to “nothing but a kind of ashen smear”. Thus, while sensory-based communication is explored by Beckett, this does not mean to say that he idealises it or finds it to be without fault.

The presented connection between the unnamable and its subject is crucial to this discussion as it points, in turn, to an experiential connection between the reader and the unnamable. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his essay 'Eye and Mind', discusses the role of visual perception as he asserts that painting is “innocent”, when compared to other art forms:

What distinguishes painting from these other cultural activities, says Merleau-Ponty, is that only painting is innocent. Painting holds the world in suspense, whereas all those who write must take a stand concerning the world. And it is because painting is innocent that it can lead us to its origin without distortion. Painting has no purpose. It

does not set out to prove anything or to have any effect. Because it does not manipulate but merely seeks to show, the study of painting can serve as a corrective to the mistaken self-understanding of science. (qtd in Levine, 441)

Beckett's work is "innocent", in a way, as he develops an extreme attitude against didacticism, and thus against "the mistaken self-understanding of science", yet Beckett also critiques this innocence, as he shows that even mute objects have suggestive power and that the supposed origin of meaning, that being, in this passage, the eye, has lost its clarity, and has been distorted into an "ashen smear". In addition to asserting painting's innocence, Merleau-Ponty describes the connection between painting and the body, and thus between painting and knowledge as gained through experience as he says: "The painting presents us not with the thing, but with that which in the thing awoke an echo in our bodies and enabled the thing to be perceived.... Painting is a making visible of that which still remains invisible to our ordinary sight" (443). Merleau-Ponty's assertion that painting is able to unveil some kind of hidden truth or reality is problematic in the context of Beckett's work, but his evocation of painting's ability to "echo in our bodies" is notable in relation to *The Unnamable*. Beckett's works may be observed, at some level, to communicate with the reader through a kind of osmotic contact, as Mauriac argues:

not a single note among them refers to what essential meaning the discovery of this author had for me. I felt it (I don't say I understood it) in several places, but in such a fleeting way, so tenuously, that I was not able to discern the words in the text that would have enabled me to retain it. (qtd in Barge, 274)

Mauriac's experience of Beckett's text, then, is one of being unable to pin down the way he has "felt" the text, yet, at the same time, of being able to pin down the fact that he has "felt" it. I would argue that Beckett's work is indeed inexplicably affective, yet there are glimpses of

the reasons why *The Unnamable* succeeds in impressing the reader in this way. The unnamable's attempt to reconcile the nature of the eye mentioned above, for example, is consistent with Merleau-Ponty's definition of line and movement in painting:

line is not a property of things, not something which circumscribes them; rather, it is something demanded by the thing; it is 'the blueprint of a genesis of things'... movement is not displacement, but vibration or radiation. Movement occurs in a painting not as the result of the capturing of one instant of a process the way a photograph does. Rather, movement takes place when there is an internal discordance among the parts of the body. (Levine, 441-43)

The unnamable, in looking at the eye, does not see clear lines, nor is he able to clearly understand the purpose of its presence. The unnamable's eye flicks away from the eye-as-object, and it becomes an “ashen smear”. Yet that eye is powerful; “It's it you see and it alone”. The meaning of the eye is unable to be captured, as it will not behave as the unnamable expects it to. Meaning, rather, lies in the eye's ability to vibrate the body and to demand that the unnamable engage in the activity of looking. Because the eye is positioned at the end of possibility and of understanding, it is uniquely provocative, and in this way, it works as modern painting does: “the painting is not a representation of something outside it. The goal of modern painting is to show the “inside” of things, to break the “skin of things” and show how the things become things, the world becomes world” (448). Merleau-Ponty's reading may, again, be critiqued for positing that visual art allows special access to a particular truth, yet his theory, that visual art expresses itself through disturbing sensory equilibrium and by appealing to the reader in a bodily way, is readily applicable to *The Unnamable* as a novel. The unnamable's experience is one of creating stories only to watch them dissolve: the unnamable passes comment on those stories only to immediately lose faith

in each of his offered conclusions. As has been observed, the reader's involvement in the meaning of the text means that they share the unnamable's experience of meaning consistently unravelling. Yet this unravelling has purpose, and, rather than leaving the reader in despair, works to create a strong, bodily impression. The edge of possibility of verbal language is experienced by the reader, the unnamable and Beckett alike. This experience is one of impossibility, yet this is what makes it the most important experience: "you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 134).

## *FILM*

Beckett's *Film* (1965) develops many of the sensory theories posited by *The Unnamable*. Significantly, the work contains only one word: "sssh!", which acts to silence all further speech. *Film* is effectively a silent film that focuses solely on the expression of its ideas through visual means. However, part of the reason that *Film* is of interest to this study is that it may be considered to be a failed experiment: "it is true that anyone even vaguely familiar with Beckett's work in the novel or in the drama might expect a deeper, less naive, and above all less obvious piece of work" (Federman, "Samuel Beckett's Film", 364)<sup>16</sup>. When compared with contemporaneous pieces such as *Play* (1963), *Film* appears overwrought. *Play*, for example, focuses on the single stage image of three tensely related individuals living out their lives in funeral urns. While there is a veritable orchestral arrangement of voices present, these voices work to reinforce the stage picture: "Voice 'holds bodies and languages together'.... It compels, tortuously, the image out of the region of imagelessness, the grey" (Murphet, "Beckett's Televisual Modernism", 68). *Film*, on the other hand, returns to narrative; it tells the story of O's attempt to escape from his own self perception. Thus, whilst the piece is concerned outwardly with visuality, as both verbal and, effectively aural stimuli are removed, *Film* is concerned with exploring what that visuality means, rather than with making images: "Essentially, all of Beckett's work, in the novel as well as in the drama, exploits its own medium, its own creative elements, as its central subject.... It is, therefore, logical that Beckett's first film should use as its subject its own essence: visual perception" (Federman, "Samuel Beckett's Film", 366).

In considering visuality in *Film*, this analysis considers Deleuze's image philosophy, that is, the exhaustion of verbal language in order to release imagery. While presenting,

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<sup>16</sup> It must be noted that Federman is reporting on the critical reception of *Film* rather than expressing his own opinion.



literally, a series of images, *Film* proves unable to produce Deleuze's imagery of exhaustion. Rather, Beckett explores the relationship between visibility and perception with reference to George Berkeley's statement: "Esse est percipi", which translates as "to be is to be perceived" (Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, 323). *Film*'s central sight-based exploration focuses on the dynamic between O, who tries to escape perception, and E, who perceives. In addition, *Film* contains outside figures, such as an unnamed old woman on the stairs, whose response to the image of the eye as represented by E is one of an "anguish of perceivedness" (323). *Film* thus acts as a statement of fidelity to a sensory philosophy of the image, yet is unable, as yet, to provide those images. *Film*'s audience, in observing the reaction of outside figures, is confronted with other audiences being affected by imagery, but is not itself greatly affected. It is notable that Beckett's discussion of sensory expression is inclusive of that mode's problematic elements. Immediately after the evocation of Berkeley's "Esse est percipi", for example, Beckett states that: "No truth value attaches to the above, regarded as merely of structural and dramatic convenience" (Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, 323). In *Film* itself, Beckett expands this statement into a discussion of the imperfection of perception. The close up of Buster Keaton's<sup>17</sup> eye that begins and ends the film, for example, is effectively blind as it blinks but does not focus: "The opening frame is thus an extended shot of a defective eye, a lens which does not see at all" (Brater, "The Thinking Eye", 168). Sensory language, then, is argued to be an important language, but also to be an imperfect language. *Film* is unique in Beckett's oeuvre for its exploration of imagery as subject matter. I posit that it is this exploration that made Beckett's later image construction so effective.

### *The shock of imagery*

As discussed, Deleuze's essay 'The Exhausted' speaks of the progression of Beckett's

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<sup>17</sup> Buster Keaton plays both O and E in *Film*.

language through stages of exhaustion towards imagery. Imagery is described as arising out of an “internal tension”, rather than being, simply, a picture (Deleuze, 9). To take *Not I* as an example, language III can be seen to develop out of the flow of Mouth's words. As Mouth moves, it blurs into an image of speechlessness. This image is created by the process of language exhausting itself and the tension created by Mouth's continual movement. The image created is connected to language (as it exemplifies speechlessness and is created from the process of exhaustion of language), yet is something other than language. The image is essentially ungraspable, as there is no one moment where it can be said to emerge for the viewer. Rather than being a static image, *Not I*'s stage image is in constant flux, and may be considered to be an unstable, Deleuzian image, that is, “[a] little alogical image, am-nesic, almost aphasic, now standing in the void, now shivering in the open” (Deleuze, 9). In relation to *Film*, Deleuze's theory of exhaustion enables the viewer to make sense of the work in the context of Beckett's oeuvre. Directly speaking, *Film* is made of images, yet is not quite made of images that possess the intensity described by Deleuze. O, in *Film*, spends much time within language I, as he attempts to exhaust combinatory possibilities. In his attempt to escape perception, O turns himself to the wall and hurries away with his face invisible, draws the curtains, removes the cat and dog, covers the budgie cage and the fish bowl, removes the picture of Jesus and destroys each and every photograph of himself. O neutralises perceptive beings and objects so as to reach a place completely free from perception. E, who is in pursuit, removes all possible human obstacles by evoking terror with his gaze. The exhaustion of both O and E's space, then, in theory is set to “dissipate the power of the image” (Deleuze, 12). Dissipation is set to occur in *Film* where O and E finally perceive one another, and where O realises that he has been running from his own perception. Beckett is exhaustive in his attention to the build up of the image and it is thus that the image itself is bound to fail. In *Not*

*I*, the image is powerful as it leaps out from the internal tension of the text and its construction is unobservable. In *Film*, however, the narrative is primarily comprised of the process of image construction, as the same look that appears on O's face appears previously on the faces of all the other people who have come into contact with E. In *Not I*, language is consistently in a state of tension, and images, subsequently, arise spontaneously from the stream of speech. *Film*, however, remains preoccupied with the process of exhaustion, and remains focused on visuality as subject matter rather than on the dissipation of images in their own right. *Film* thus functions, much as *The Unnamable* does, as a thesis for Beckett's later works. The piece is indicative of Beckett's commitment to an exhaustive aesthetic as it systematically leads the viewer through possibilities of space and thought, and provides a theoretical space from which images may, later, arise. Where *The Unnamable* posits the importance of aporia, without yet providing true speechlessness, *Film* posits the importance of images, without yet providing such an image. Federman has said the Beckett, in focusing on visual images in *Film*, eliminates all other aspects of the art: "For this reason, not only does he eliminate sound in favor of visual images, but he renders the meaning of his script so simple, so apparent that the story itself becomes trivial, almost irrelevant" (Federman, "Samuel Beckett's Film", 366). I posit that "the story", rather than being irrelevant, is central to *Film*, in that Beckett tells a "story" of perception and of exhaustion of the possibilities of perception. O and E, for example, are characters in a recognisable narrative, which tracks the development of their relationship, as defined by the nature of their perception of one another. At the beginning of *Film*, O is afraid of the power of perception, while E holds clandestine perceptive power and is afraid of revealing himself as the source of that power. This mutual fear builds and culminates in the final image of recognition. Periodically, perception by outside characters, such as the woman on the stairs and the couple on the street, contribute to the central

narrative. Visual perception, then, becomes the what said of the piece. The medium of silent film necessarily dictates that visual perception is also *Film's* way said.

By creating space for a discussion of perception, Beckett may be considered to be extending his verbal language critique. In *The Unnamable*, Beckett discusses the way in which verbal language has become overused, and, thus, has lost its ability to communicate effectively. Through his use of onomatopoeic language, Beckett attempts to break the reader's habitual connection between words and their sounds, and to refocus attention to the sensory properties of words. Philosopher Henri Bergson, as discussed in Gontarski's article "What It Is to Have Been", similarly ascribes to the idea that sensory information brings the reader closer to direct understanding:

"What is required is that we should break with certain habits of thinking and perceiving that have become natural to us. We must return to the direct perception of change and mobility"... Bergson's dicta are in many respects consonant with the Aristotelian empiricism of Aquinas summarized in the principle, nihil in intellectu "nothing in the mind," which, as the phrase continues, nisi prius fuerit in sensu, "that was not in the senses first". (qtd in Gontarski, "What It Is to Have Been", 68)

In light of the connection between sensory information and knowledge, Bergson idealises the communicative power of visual expression:

[Bergson] proposes understanding 'the image' as a bridge between those objectively existing things and our thoughts. A bridge, because the image exists both in the thing that has or projects an image consistent with the nature of its own being, and in our minds, which receive the projected images in the manner of a screen. (Uhlmann, "Image and Intuition", 91)

Images, then, are powerful as they are present as part of the physicality of actual objects, as

well as their representations. A painting, for example is able to be understood in a sensory way, much as an “objectively existing thing” is sensed. It is thus that visual expression acts as “a bridge” to thought. This is as opposed to abstract, verbal expression which is not connected to the senses, and is thus able only to access thought indirectly. Bergson describes the project of philosophy as doomed, as philosophers attempt to explain intuitions through verbal language: “something simple, infinitely simple, so extraordinarily simple that the philosopher has never succeeded in saying it. And that is why he went on talking all his life... to convey with an increasing approximation the simplicity of his original intuition” (qtd, 93). Beckett is similarly concerned with the failure of language to explain what it is given to explain, as can be seen in his use of the word silence in *The Unnamable*, which actively draws attention to its contradictory nature: a word to denote a lack of words. Beckett's *Film*, similarly, appears to ascribe to the notion that visual language is able to convey ideas more effectively, as the possibility of verbal language expression is eradicated through the initial “sssh!”. *Film* dramatises the process of perception through its narrative and through the relationships of its characters to one another. It has been observed that O and E's relationship is defined by their perception of one another, yet it is important to note that the relationship between *viewers* and *Film*'s characters is similarly sense-based. Antony Uhlmann has noted that “*Film* both begins and ends with a big close-up of the eye, an image that directly hails the viewer as complicit, in the manner of Baudelaire's 'hypocrite lecteur'” (Uhlmann, “Image and Intuition”, 98). Here, Uhlmann refers to Baudelaire's poem 'Au Lecteur', where the reader is made complicit in the poet's lurid conception of human evil (Baudelaire, 5). In Beckett's piece, the viewer is made complicit by the inclusion of other viewers in *Film*. Before E is perceived by O, he is perceived by the couple on the street, and the woman on the stairs. It is thus that, while Beckett creates no image that has the power to shock the viewer's sensory capacities, he does

present a series of viewers, who appear to have been shocked by what they have perceived. All who perceive E are presented as having been overwhelmed by E, as they are confronted with the “anguish of perceivedness”. The characters in *Film*, then, give testament to the power of imagery, as they appear to have seen something beyond explanation, even if outside viewers of *Film* have not. The reaction by the viewer-characters is consistent with experience of a Deleuzean image, that is, one that erupts from exhausted language due to its own internal tension. The image of E is experienced by the viewer-characters as shocking and surprising, thus leading the audience to believe that the image exists apart from usual expression; it cannot be calmly contemplated. In addition, the image of E is directly perceived by the viewer-characters' visual sense. E does not appear on-screen to explain the nature of perception to characters in dialogue or monologue, and thus to demand understanding through abstract thought. Rather, E is directly perceived and, thus, directly experienced. The experience of viewer-characters functions, in turn, as examples to *Film's* actual audience. As the viewer-characters are observed as having direct experience of imagery, it is suggested that the audience “break with (their own) habits of thinking and perceiving”, and focus on experiencing *Film* through their sensory faculties. Such sensory involvement is inextricably linked with the viscosity of art, as “[i]mages are “perceived when my senses are open to them, unperceived when they are closed” (Gontarski, “What It Is to Have Been”, 67). Thus, the viewer, in focusing on the story, or the literary experience of *Film*, rather than the sensory experience offered, is in danger of being closed to the work's imagery. Beckett's sensory demand is described by Gontarski in his discussion of *Ohio Impromptu* (1981):

The play's impact lies not in the curious narrative being read aloud, since that is already written and so static, but in the interplay and layering of image and memory.... It is Beckett working on the nerves of his audience. (73-4)

*Film* narrates the process of images “working on the nerves” of its viewers, and in turn, suggests that the audience open their nerves to allow sensory understanding. The audience become examples of Baudelaire's “hypocrite lecteur”, as they must provide a sensitivity to imagery in order to fully experience Beckett's art.

In addition to the eyes of the characters that populate *Film* (O, E, the couple on the stairs, the cat, the dog and so on), and the eyes of the audience, Beckett creates an eye in the form of the camera. This eye is, as any camera is, the viewer's filter for scripted action as it acts to distort O and E's reality before delivering it to the viewer. The camera-eye in *Film*, however, is more autonomous, and has been described by Brater as a “thinking eye” (Brater, “The Thinking Eye”, 170). The camera, then, can be considered to take the role of “hypocrite lecteur”; of the viewer complicit in perception and creation. Brater describes how Beckett's camera may be considered to have autonomy as: “it makes connections that completely escape us: the close-up of Keaton's creased eye is followed by the camera lingering on the similarly contoured surface texture of the about-to-be-knocked-down wall” (171). The camera, then, actively looks about itself in order to edit the production of imagery in *Film*. It is thus that Brater concludes that “*Film* is... a movie about the experience of our eyes watching other eyes watching us, the overexposure neatly accomplished by the superhuman eye of the camera... *Film* thus demands a new visual responsiveness” (171). In this statement, Brater refers to *Film*'s focus on its own sensory nature and visibility. Beckett, in focusing on the nature of perception in such detail, creates a strong argument for the importance of sensory-based knowledge; Beckett demands “a new visual responsiveness”.

### *Flawed imagery*

Thus far, I have discussed the connection between Beckett's imagery as presented in *Film* and his fidelity to a visual aesthetic. When analysing Beckett's work, however, it is extremely

important to note its stubborn lack of closure; its refusal to be explained by a single, all-encompassing theorem. In light of this, it must be noted that there are parts of *Film* where Beckett dramatises the flawed nature of perception. Keaton's eye; the image that both begins and ends *Film*, for example, is effectively depicted as blind as it blinks but does not focus: "The opening frame is thus an extended shot of a defective eye, a lens which does not see at all" (Brater, "The Thinking Eye", 168). It is thus that both O and E (as both are Keaton) are shown to be, at least in part, unable to perceive.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the flawed nature of perception, Beckett explores the flawed nature of the process of blocking out perception. Thus, Beckett shows that it is impossible to perceive without a certain level of blindness, and, on the other hand, that it is impossible to be totally blind; to block out perception completely. The inner curtain that O urgently pulls to block outside eyes, for example, is full of holes, and the outer curtain is mesh and, therefore, similarly ineffective. Beckett also uses slapstick comedy to show that O's obsessiveness with escaping perception is somewhat ridiculous, as he pokes fun at O's fear of the power of cat/dog perception: O removes the dog, and as he goes to remove the cat, the dog runs back in; O goes to remove the dog once again and the cat runs back in, and so on and so forth. O's response to the eyes that populate his space may seem, at times, to verge on paranoid. Without delay, he sees fit to close the curtains, to cover the mirror and to get rid of all of the living pairs of eyes. But this is followed by a struggle with other, more ambiguous pairs of eyes, as O must look through all of the photographs before ripping them up. O removes the picture of Jesus, but is very concerned with the distinctive patch it has left behind on the wall. Similarly, the eyes on the rocking chair and folder are noted, studied, and eventually left be. There is, then, an implicit hierarchy of eyes. In broader terms, O's actions draw attention to the variation of lenses through which one

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<sup>18</sup> It is probable that these images are of the eye behind Keaton's eyepatch, and, thus, are representative of his 'blind eye'.



views one's surroundings. Similarly, in *The Unnamable*, readers are made to consider a varied spectrum of voices, and thus ways of understanding language. The point at which O finds perception unacceptably intrusive appears to be somewhere between living and non-living eyes, as he hesitates over whether photographed eyes or eye-shapes in the back of a chair pose a real threat. In response, some viewers may judge all of his actions to be paranoid, while others may think him rational, on account of the looks of terror on other character's faces when they are perceived. Thus, viewers share in the difficulty of attempting to understand the level of threat posed by perception. It appears, then, that the connection between being and perception is ambiguous rather than natural, and that Berkeley's statement "Esse est percipi" is overly simplistic. This struggle to understand the nature of perception may be compared to the struggle with silence as presented in *The Unnamable*. In the novel, silence is both wanted and unwanted, whereas in *Film*, perception is always unwanted but O may alternately be considered to be paranoid or justified in his aversion. Perception may be powerful, as shown in its ability to create terror in all who are perceived by E, and in its ability to create being, as evidenced by Berkeley's statement. Perception may also be impotent, as shown by Keaton's blind eye. Perception, in *Film*, then works to demand open reading of the text, and to alert readers to the many possible ways of understanding the work. This openness of reading contributes to the development in "the reader or spectator an extra sense of perception" (Federman, "Samuel Beckett's Film", 368-9). Viewers of *Film* must enter the discussion of meaning, and must enter the creative process, much as readers of *The Unnamable* are drawn into argument with the open text.

Thus far I have discussed Beckett's evocation of flawed perception and vision for aesthetic effect. Notably, however, *Film* also contains examples of unintentionally flawed images. I have already mentioned the presence of a hierarchy of perception, as alive eyes

appear more effective than dead/mechanical eyes, and, subsequently, O's desire to escape their gaze appears to be more urgent. This hierarchy is problematic as it seems to invite a level of engagement with certainty that Beckett, as a proponent of intuitive, open reading, would resist. While there are no words in *Film*, there is a definite what said, or story that is present. This story requires progression and movement, and the hierarchy of perception is appropriate to that narrative. However, it may be considered a mistake as the hierarchy is highly suggestive, and seems to demand explanation. Perception becomes a riddle that is to be resolved, rather than being conveyed through *Film's* sensory and imagistic aspects. The concept of perception, then, is the subject matter of *Film* rather than its way said or mode of expression. The final image of E and O perceiving one another also detracts from the way said of *Film* as it is an expected image. By the time *Film* culminates, it has been seen twice before, as when E is perceived, the reaction appears to be the same, inexplicable terror. When E is finally able to sneak up on O while he sleeps, then, O's reaction may be accurately guessed. As a narrative moment, the image of O and E's perception of one another is successful, as the idea that O and E are the same person comes as a revelation to the audience. Similarly, O's response in relation to perception of E is surprising, as the reason for absolute terror is unclear. However, the image itself fails as the same reaction to E has been observed twice before.

Elsewhere in Beckett's oeuvre, repetition has been used in other, more effective ways. In *Not I*, for example, phrases, such as “what?... who?... no!... she!” are often repeated and, in this case, function to add to the power of the stage image through changing the mouth shape in dramatic ways (Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, 377). In *Watt*, too, Beckett employs repetition of items in order to exhaust every possible combination of words:

For one day Mr Knott would be tall, fat, pale and dark, and the next thin, small,

flushed and fair, and the next sturdy, middlesized, yellow and ginger, and the next small, fat, pale and fair, and the next middlesized, flushed, thin and ginger, and the next tall, yellow, dark and sturdy, and the next fat, middlesized, ginger and pale, and the next tall, thin, dark and flushed, and the next small, fair, sturdy and yellow... or so it seemed to Watt, to mention only the figure, stature, skin and hair. (Beckett, *Watt*, 209-211)

The methodical, process-based nature of *Film*, however, means that the three, successive images of terror work to dilute the final image's power rather than to build up its internal tension. In other words, Beckett uses the image of the “anguish of perceivedness” as most other writers use images, that is, to narrate the story, and to provide pictorial reference to key moments in that story. Each narrative section: in the street, in the stairwell, and in the room itself, is accompanied by its own variation of the same image. Each image shows a different person or persons becoming aware of perception by E, and reacting in the same way. In *Film's* script, Beckett’s original instructions for the opening scene are as follows:

Moderate animation of workers going unhurriedly to work. All going in the same direction and all in couples.... All persons in opening scene to be shown in some way perceiving- one another, an object, a shop window, a poster, etc., i.e. all contentedly in *percipere* and *percipi*. (Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, 324)

This image, while evoking contented rather than discontented perception, works to prepare the reader for the focus on the nature of perception. While this image was not present in the final cut of *Film*, in combination with the repeated image of perception by E, it shows that Beckett is engaged in the reiteration of a single point, and in providing guidance for the viewer in order to prepare them for his final image. Thus, the image in *Film* is almost entirely based on theory and narrative, and may not act spontaneously.

In addition to the aforementioned visual hierarchy in *Film*, the relation between O's perspective and E's perspective proves hierarchical and, thus, problematic. In order to solve the problem of dual perception in the filmic medium, Beckett specified that O and E's visions be distinguished by a gauze over the lens, meaning that O's perspective is blurrier than E's. While this is a neat solution to the problem, it necessarily means that O's view is more distorted than E's, though they are effectively the same person. It is almost certain that Beckett did not intend viewers to judge the differing perspectives of O and E according to a hierarchy, and that the hierarchy was created out of necessity rather than design. However, the fact that the two protagonists' viewpoints are qualitatively different means that the visual hierarchy is central to *Film*. The gauze literally distorts O's lens and thus suggests his view is deficient when compared to E. If the deficiency were to be read according to a psychological model, evidence could be found for O's paranoia, as well as his desire for removal from his own reality, and his inability to connect with that reality. It could then be posited that the reason O is so terrified when confronted with E is because he has become aware of the realities of perspective after spending time in imperfect perception. The fact that, what is effectively a mistake, is able to lead to such psychological modeling is extremely problematic. My analysis is necessarily a misreading, on account of forcing purpose onto a purposeless hierarchy. Brater similarly engages in over-analysis as he pronounces that "[t]he self-perception O achieves in spite of himself at the conclusion of the movie is, therefore, a very shaky one indeed: blurred, distorted, heavily out of focus" (Brater, "The Thinking Eye", 171). Though this conclusion is valid, for O has evidently not found closure in any sense, it is weakened by its reliance on O's blurred lens. Within the piece as a whole, no character involved, including viewers, could be described as having a clear perspective at the conclusion of *Film*. The experience of distortion and confusion is not limited to O, but the fact

that O must be given a gauze makes this more difficult to comprehend. As the repetition of the image of terror, the gauze has the effect of preparing the reader for conclusions, and is thus at odds with Beckett's demand for lack of closure. I would argue that this is at least partly a result of Beckett's relative inexperience with the medium of film. The problems of technique and method raised by Beckett's creative vision seem insurmountable, and Beckett thus creates an artwork that is subordinate to, rather than master of, its form.

### *Fidelity to failure*

It is interesting to consider *Film* in light of Beckett's oft quoted "fidelity to failure" (Beckett, *Proust*, 125). *Film* functions as a manifesto for Beckett's commitment to imagery, yet it does not, in itself, create that imagery. The work, whilst solely visual, is concerned with the what said, and with discussion of the nature of perception. In saying this, the fact that the piece "fails" is, in many ways, where its importance lies. The work becomes unique in how organic and utterly unexpected it is, as Beckett himself has noted:

after the second [viewing of a rough cut of *Film*] I felt it really was something. Not quite in the way intended, but as a sheer beauty, power and strangeness of image.... In other words and generally speaking, from having been troubled by a certain failure to communicate fully by purely visual means the basic intention, I now begin to feel that this is unimportant and that the images obtained probably gain in force what they lose as ideograms and that the whole idea behind the film, while sufficiently expressed for those so minded, has been chiefly of value on the formal and structural level. (qtd in Uhlmann, "Image and Intuition", 101-2)

For, while Beckett's expressive powers, in many ways, fail in this piece, Beckett himself has professed the importance of failure. Thus far, I have measured the success of *Film* according to a lack of powerful imagery. However, the fact Beckett's imagery is imperfect is part of its

power as, whilst certain aspects result in unintended closure as discussed earlier, imperfection may be seen to result, in other ways, in its own kind of openness. This is not because the piece breaks out of language constraints, as Beckett's later images sometimes have the power to do, but because the image is, crucially, "slightly off" (Garner Jr., 368). Uhlmann speaks of the power of unintentionally created images:

This image, in turn, carries with it an attribute shared by all images: it does not convey a single meaning, but, rather, is open to interpretations, interpretations that may overlap with but also exceed or elude the intended meanings. Each of these interpretations, however, will in turn be exceeded or eluded by the image, which offers still further potential meanings than those circumscribed by the interpretation of any given reader. A dynamic interplay, then, is set up between the image, the intentions that founded the image, and the interpretations that relate to the image. (Uhlmann, "Image and Intuition", 102)

Uhlmann here reminds the viewer that an image does not exist in isolation and that it depends on the power of meanings that are given to it, as well as the meaning intended, and the meaning created by the image itself. It is thus that while *Film* ultimately fails, it is its openness that makes it important. It might also be considered that, as the work in many ways acts as a space for Beckett to focus on the question of perception, its relation to his creative project as a whole is invaluable.

### *QUADRAT I + II*

Stylistically, *Quadrat I + II* join the ranks of *Film* within Beckett's oeuvre, as both are completely wordless. Despite surface similarity, however, *Quad I + II* are markedly more developed than *Film*, as they are further removed from narrative structure, and are able to exist as images in their own right. Indeed, *Quad* has been considered the peak of Beckett's oeuvre, and has been described as “a perfect shape. No language, pure poetry, dance, geometry, mathematics... It is the purest piece of work he has done” (*Waiting for Beckett*, 1:09:07). *Quad* has four actors who walk according to a mathematical pattern in a square room. Each figure in *Quad I* is differentiated by a different colour robe; they enter through a corner of the room, walk down one side, then move to cross on the diagonal, always sidestepping the centre. The sequence then repeats. Each figure periodically leaves the room via the corner of the room, so that at any one time, there is either one, two, three, or all four figures visible onscreen. The sound of the shuffling footsteps is clearly noticeable, and there are mechanical sounds marking entrances and exits of figures. *Quad II* is composed of the same four figures moving in the same pattern as *Quad I*, but can be differentiated by its having been shot in black and white. In addition, the figures wear “identical white gowns” rather than individual colours, and there is an absence of mechanical sounds (Brater, “Towards a Poetics”, 52-3). As a result, *Quad II* appears as a pared down version of the original, and thus exemplifies Beckett's tendency to whittle away at his images; to slowly remove all that he considers superfluous. The production of *Quad II* was, according to accounts, a serendipitous event. Beckett reportedly saw a rough of *Quad I* in black and white and said “marvelous, it's 100,000 years later” (52). The progression from *Quad I* to *II* may be considered to be indicative of Beckett's process of image creation. *Quad I* directs the viewer's focus to the movement of bodies, as well as to the elements of image and sound. Beckett, in

*Quad II*, works to pare down the image in order to achieve “the utmost clarity and economy of expression”, and to focus in on the image (Esslin, 87).

This discussion begins by considering the role of language in *Quad*. While *Quad* is itself wordless, it must be considered in light of Beckett's oeuvre, the majority of which is comprised of verbal language. Deleuze's philosophy of exhaustion, which has been applied to both *The Unnamable* and *Film* proves useful in understanding the verbal residues that remain in *Quad*. In this work, Deleuze's language I is observable in the mathematical repetition of action and the “feverish monotony” of the moving figures (Brater, “Towards a Poetics”, 51). Here, the figures' movement embodies the process of exhaustion of words. The fact that exhaustion is presented physically means that the viewer is affected in a sensory manner. The text becomes an experience rather than something that can simply be observed, as the presentation of movement connects with the viewer's physical being. The viewer is doubly engaged in the presented action as they are connected intellectually and in a bodily way. In addition, the figures in *Quad* are in and of themselves, images of engaged movement. As discussed in my chapter on *The Unnamable*, this engaged attitude works to connect Beckett to a philosophy of phenomenology.

Derrida's post-structuralist philosophy is also of importance to this discussion as, though his relationship with phenomenology is complex, his description of aporia relates to phenomenology's focus on experience. Aporia is described as the *impossible* experience, and as a speechlessness in the face of that experience. In turn, that experience is considered to be a vital experience. The concept of aporia evokes contradiction, as what is the most impossible is described as the most important. Beckett's *Quad* dramatises the aporetic experience, as movement continues despite the apparent exhaustion of possibility. Rather than resulting in a defeat of action, then, repetition results in the possibility of creative action, as while the



figures in *Quad* come closer to using up all energy for movement, and to completing all possible combinations of movement, the more possibilities for movement arise. Thus, movement towards Derrida's aporia and towards Deleuze's exhaustion leads to further imagistic possibility. The repetition of the action builds up "internal tension" that allows for the dissipation of a Deleuzian image. Similarly, the aporetic figures are shown to be able to change, despite the seemingly infinite quality of their movement, as can be observed from the transition from *Quad I* to *II*. In addition to providing conditions for imagery, *Quad* can be considered as a powerful piece of imagery in its own right as it, quite literally, exists as the presentation of bodies moving wordlessly in patterns. In addition, the medium of television requires the viewer to catch presented images before they "vanish... into a field of dancing grey dots" (Albright, 6). Due to the sensory immediacy of the piece, viewers necessarily contribute to the imagism of *Quad*. Beckett's presented image, then, creates possibility as the bodies continue to move, and creates possibility through implicating the creativity of viewers. The moving image, as presented in *Quad*, is able to beget many images, and thus to have a unique aesthetic power.

### *Exhaustion*

*Quad I + II* contain no verbal language whatsoever. Even *Film* contains a tongue in cheek "sssh!", which, while functioning to silence all other language, remains an example of language being used to earnest purpose. *Quad I + II* are, thus, effectively unique in Beckett's oeuvre, and are particularly significant with regards to this discussion of the non-verbal.<sup>19</sup> It is important, however, to consider *Quad* in a verbal light, as Beckett is, largely, considered to be a writer. Elizabeth Klaver speaks of Beckett's works of the 1980s<sup>20</sup> as being "More formal and

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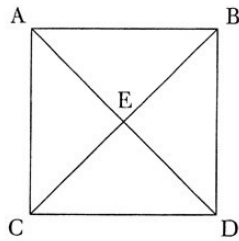
<sup>19</sup> Beckett's dramaticule *Breath* is his only other completely wordless work. In this 25 second-long piece, there is a birth-cry, the sound of inhaling and exhaling, followed by another birth-cry. The stage is littered with rubbish.

<sup>20</sup> Klaver groups *Quad* with *Ohio Impromptu* and *What Where* in her discussion.

abstract than the plays of the 1950s and 1960s”, yet also notes that they are “still textually driven structures that raise, paradoxically, the question of what constitutes a text” (Klaver, 366). Klaver argues that a text differs from a work of visual art in that it is concerned with the nature of verbal language expression: “*Quad I* has transferred the problematics of a verbal language onto more tactile, semiotic systems, those of body, movement, light, sound, and color” (373). By “problematics of verbal language”, Klaver refers to those aspects of *Quad* that may be broadly classified under Deleuze's language I, namely, mathematical permutations of words which are here transposed onto the repetitive movement of bodies. Beckett's Molloy shuffles his sucking stones between his pockets, and in doing so, seeks to exhaust all possible combinations of the actions of shuffling and sucking stones:

Taking a stone from the right pocket of my greatcoat, and putting it in my mouth, I replaced it in the right pocket of my greatcoat by a stone from the right pocket of my trousers, which I replaced by a stone from the left pocket of my trousers, which I replaced by a stone from the left pocket of my greatcoat, which I replaced by the stone which was in my mouth, as soon as I had finished sucking it.... I might do better to transfer the stones four by four, instead of one by one, that is to say, during the sucking, to take the three stones remaining in the right pocket of my greatcoat and replace them by the four in the right pocket of my trousers, and these by the four in the left pocket of my trousers, and these by the four in the left pocket of my greatcoat, and finally these by the three from the right pocket of my greatcoat, plus the one, as soon as I had finished sucking it, which was in my mouth. (Beckett, *Molloy*, 93-4)

In *Quad*, the figures similarly work to exhaust action as they enact the algorithm of their space. I quote from Beckett's script at length:



Course 1: AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA

Course 2: BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB

Course 3: CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC

Course 4: DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD

1 enters at A, completes his course and is joined by 3. Together they complete their courses and are joined by 4. Together all three complete their courses and are joined by 2. Together all four complete their courses. Exit 1. (Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, 451)

The figures in *Quad* may be considered to be carrying out a similar, exhaustive project to Molloy, and it is thus that the piece remains “burdened with calculations” (Deleuze, 9). While Molloy describes combinations of actions, the figures in *Quad* embody combinations of actions; while Molloy remains definitely within verbal language, the figures in *Quad* move past verbal language. They do not, however, entirely leave the concerns of that language behind.

Whilst I have here discussed *Quad* in terms of language I, it is important to note that Deleuze takes *Quad* to be an example of language III. Language III may be described, as has been noted earlier in this thesis, as the dissipation of images in response to internal tensions created by the total exhaustion of verbal language. Deleuze describes how space in *Quad* has been “depotentialized” as the logic of mathematics in the piece means that its figures may never meet (13). Thus, the image that arises is one of moving bodies on an “objectless

journey” (13). Deleuze also describes how the internal tension of images means that they are created and dissipated in almost the same moment: “The energy – mad, captive, and ready to explode... ensures that the images never last long. The images merge with the detonation, the combustion, the dissipation of their condensed energy” (11). It is this insistence, on the image dissipating as it is created, that becomes problematic when applied to *Quad*. In *Not I*, images arise and retreat back into the flow of speech, that is, language III occasionally bursts out of language II. *Quad*, on the other hand, is an image of exhaustion, and yet also exhibits the impossibility of the end of that exhaustion. Thus, *Quad* represents an image that continues to build upon itself. Audrey Wasser describes the juxtaposition of decomposition and creation in Beckett's work:

Exhaustion describes the positive moment of a liminal state: at once a maximal passivity and the origin of action, a depletion and an extenuation, a point of saturation and the passage to a change of state... Just as there is a science of decomposition, so there is a grammar of invention; Beckett's art meticulously dramatizes both of these. (Wasser, 133)

*Quad* describes the end of possibility as it works by “neutralizing the potential event at the center”, that is, to apparently out-rule the possibility of a collision of characters in the centre of the square (130). It is thus that the figures' space has become, in effect, “depotentialized”, yet rather than becoming static; rather than dissipating the imagery, the figures in *Quad* continue to move and to traverse and explore the square. In addition, the production of *Quad II* after the creation of *Quad I*, means that the figures are capable of moving, and that the image is capable of continuing, for at least a hundred thousand years. The depotentialization of space, then, has enormous potential for change. The figures in *Quad I* move in the same patterns for twenty five minutes and viewers are likely to feel as though they know the image.

*Quad II* is then played out, and the same movements continue, while all other aspects of the work become comparatively pared down. *Quad II* is emptied of colour, sound has been reduced to the sound of footsteps, and the figures' movement becomes less lively and more residual; it is as though the image has come closer to true exhaustion. While *Quad I* appears a fixed image that is to continue ad infinitum in the same form, it is evident that it has great potential to change. It is thus that "Beckett's combinatorial has a constructive aspect... it constructs the possible even as it exhausts it" (129). Rather than the release of the image resulting in its own dissipation, the image consistently creates potential for new imagery.

By evoking exhaustion of combinatory possibilities, Beckett evokes Deleuze's language I. Rather than exhausting possible combinations of words, however, Beckett presents the exhaustion of combinations of bodily movements. Beckett's evocation of language I works to strengthen the image, as each repetition of body movement acts to create new possibilities for imagery. In my discussion of *The Unnamable*, I evoked cubist paintings to describe the way in which many impressions of a subject are fused to create an impression of a singular, fused image, rather than a succession of images. This analogy similarly applies to *Quad*, as moving figures serve to strengthen a particular image, rather a narrative series. The figures do not move in order to advance a storyline, rather they move to emphasise the same image. Each repetition of the mathematical pattern enhances the viewer's perception of the exhaustion of space, rather than introducing a new narrative possibility. Thus, time appears to act simultaneously rather than a linearly. Time has the effect of continually referring the viewer back to the primary qualities of *Quad*, which, as in painting, may be described as "the object's form and its position in space" (Chipp, 256). Beckett's *Quad* may thus be considered to be an image of exhaustion, rather than a story or narrative of exhaustion. As has been observed, Beckett's image, of figures in motion in space, as well as existing as an

image in its own right, is able to beget its own imagery as it begets possibility. *Quad II*, for example, is an image created from the possibility of *Quad I*, yet there are many more possibilities for imagery. As in a cubist painting, the viewer “put[s] together the various conceptions and comprehend their variety in one perception” (256). There is then, a potentially great variety of viewer perceptions, and these visual impressions must be considered as part of the overall visuality of *Quad*. In *Quad*, Beckett creates an image, which is then processed and created as an image in the viewers' minds. While this may be said of viewer-response to most artworks, Beckett's work is significant in that the viewer's creation, is, like the cubist viewers', essential to the process of image formation. The viewer creates part of the artwork rather than simply responding to that artwork. Linda Ben-Zvi has distinguished between verbal language and imagery by pronouncing that verbal language has been “reduced to making 'pictures of pictures of pictures'”, whereas pictures may be considered to be pictures within themselves. (Ben-Zvi, “Beckett, Mauthner”, 190). In her statement, Ben-Zvi simply means to evoke the idea that imagery is closer to its source than language, yet in Beckett's art, it is evident that the “pictures of pictures of pictures” can be as vivid as the original pictures. It is thus that *Quad* may be considered to be an example of the fertility of Beckett's imagery.

### *Quad's minimalism*

The progressive “exhaustion” of Beckett's imagery is also of import as it refers to the process of Beckett's creative project across his oeuvre. Previously, I have discussed how both *Film* and *The Unnameable* act as thesis-like pieces for future works. *Quad* may be considered, rather, to take a retrospective view of Beckett's creative processes. *Quad I* is a connotative piece, particularly when compared to Beckett's other work of the same period. *Rockaby* for example, is a monochromatic stage image of a singular figure and a singular disembodied

voice. In *Quad I*, there are four figures rather than one figure, and those figures are clad in bright primary colours. *Quad I* is concerned with physical, patterned movement, a subject which is raised often in Beckett's art, yet it is, atypically, full of colour and sound. Beckett's earlier works, such as *Waiting for Godot*, are embellished with lewd jokes, and with figures with determinable characters, though these aspects are continually pared down as Beckett's art progresses. *Quad II*, then, when compared with *Quad I*, seems to function as a dramatization of the process that Beckett has focused on consistently throughout his career, that is, to heed Marcel Duchamp's demand for art to: "reduce, reduce, reduce" (Chipp, 393). Brater describes this process of paring down the image: "Although *Quad II* revives the same four players, they now appear costumed in "identical white gowns" to accent the neutrality of a dehydrated image: no color, no percussion, only the sound of feet falling not so faintly this time around (Brater, "Towards a Poetics", 52-3). It is thus that the trajectory from *Quad I* to *II* appears to dramatise trajectory of Beckett's oeuvre: towards an exhausted aesthetic.

The aesthetic of exhaustion, in turn, necessarily begs comparison with the minimalist movement. As a concept, minimalism is not new, and has always been explored by artists in some form, as Horace describes in his *Ars Poetica* of 18BC: "When you give instruction, be brief, what's quickly/Said the spirit grasps easily, faithfully retains:/Everything superfluous flows out of a full mind" (Lines 335-7). Frazer Ward's definition of minimalism proves useful in regards to Beckett's work as it relates minimalism to the body, by describing its "foregrounding [of] the embodied, temporal quality of the viewer's experience of art" (Ward, 29). Ward refers to the work of performance artists, who create work in real time, using real bodies. However, as the subject of *Quad* is literally moving bodies within a sparse, minimalist space, the work seems appropriately concerned with "embodied" and "temporal" qualities to be considered an example of Ward's minimalism. As well as the aforementioned

characteristics, minimalism may be defined by its:

undermining [of] the conventions by which art pose[s] as a vehicle of meaning, claiming to produce, instead, what Judd called “specific objects,” artworks that would resist all interpretation. Various typical features of minimalist work – lack of titles, use of basic geometric forms, seriality, generation by mathematical formula, and so on – conspire to thwart our tendency to look beyond the work, to think, and instead encourage intense concentration on visual experiencing itself. (Crowell, 38)

This definition could fairly be applied to Beckett's work, as he aspires to “artworks that... resist all interpretation”, and “encourage intense concentration on visual experiencing”. *Quad II*, when compared to *Quad I*, contains noticeably less connotative elements such as colour, so as an entire piece, *Quad* can be said to become progressively minimalist. However, Beckett parts from Steven Crowell's definition as he seeks to create active viewers, and therefore necessarily allows the work to exist beyond itself. Beckett, then, is not entirely defined by the movement of minimalism. John B. Brough has said that:

The best films... hone the phenomena and pare away the incidental to let the essence shine through. The essence is universal, but not abstract. It reveals itself only in the film's concrete images, which reflect the essential because they have been shaped and distilled by the filmmaker's imagination, always with a view to seeing. (Brough, 197-8)

By shaping pared down images as Beckett does, he proves himself profoundly interested in the idea of seeing, yet this is not to the point of abstraction. His images are minimal, but not minimalist, as they maintain a powerful connection to the reality of objects.

### *Role of the Viewer*

Minimalist techniques are utilised by Beckett in order to foreground the process of viewer



perception. The way in which *Quad* is experienced by viewers may, in turn, be considered to contribute to its visuality. The work primarily offers information at a sensory level, as the viewer responds to colour, tone, space and movement. This differs from an experience of verbal language, which may only indirectly evoke imagery. Margaret Iversen, in her discussion of Roland Barthes' art theory, describes the relative distance of verbal language from direct sensory experience:

Barthes wrote an interesting essay on the French Surrealist painter, Andre Masson, and particularly his use of Chinese ideograms. These paintings embodied for Barthes a theory of the text and of writing. Such beautiful calligraphic marks, he noted, cannot be reduced to mere communication, for they are at the same time gestures, that is drawn lines which point back to 'the body which throbs'... Barthes concludes that what we learn from Masson's work is that 'for writing to be manifest in its truth (and not in its instrumentality), it must be illegible'. (qtd in Iversen, 333)

Barthes is concerned with the connection between the physical elements of art and the “unique body of the artist” (333). I posit that these elements also point to the body of the viewer, thus, connection with visual works is direct, whereas verbal language acts as an instrumentality for acquiring experience. Barthes evokes an “alternative semiotics” of visual language which, as discussed earlier in relation to onomatopoeia in *The Unnamable*, considers the way in which the physical properties of language inform the reader, rather than simply communicating through their abstract content (Goh, 271). In *Quad*, the experience of the viewer is guided by the presence of physical cues, as represented in *Quad I* by mechanical sounds and the sounds of feet shuffling, and in *Quad II* by the more pronounced sound of feet on floor boards. The mechanical sounds present in *Quad I* function to cue the figures' movement, as unique percussive sounds announce the movement of each into the square from

the sidelines:

In his script Beckett calls for four sounds: “say drum, gong, triangle, wood block.”

The actual instruments used were two Javanese gongs, an African woodblock and an African talking drum, and, as Beckett added whimsically, “a wonderful wastebasket – from Rathmines.” (Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, 108)

In addition, the sounds of feet on floorboards announce the presence of the figures as part of the image: “the floor or ground – the 'boards' as Beckett calls them in *Waiting for Godot* – appeared to be a source of energy, and [is], of course, the only place where the actors could 'speak' with their feet” (Homan, 38). In *Quad II*, these foot sounds are more pronounced than in the former, as movement, in losing mechanical sounds, has only one voice through which it may assert itself. Movement, in both cases, becomes an activity rooted in the present, as sounds demand the inauguration of movement, and mark its occurrence. It is thus that movement is compelled directly; the piece does not compel contemplation of movement. In turn, the figures who are off-stage at any time become active watchers of movement. The figures in *Quad*, then, are at any time participating as an active watcher or an active mover, and have the “double status of being past-performers and present-audience, watching their fellow performers still onstage” (37). The figures are either involved in the action of the stage picture, accompanied by sound, or they are observing the stage picture, accompanied by silence.

The engagement of figures in activities of movement and perception enables *Quad* to be considered phenomenologically. Merleau-Ponty, in *The Phenomenology of Perception* describes the process of engaged perception as he says: “when I perceive, I am directed toward the entire world through my point of view, and I do not even know the limits of my visual field” (Merleau-Ponty, 344). Merleau-Ponty then proceeds to describe Cézanne’s

painting as demanding this kind of perception: “When I gaze upon the brilliant green of Cézanne’s vase, it does not cause me to think of pottery, it presents it to me, it is there, along with its thin and smooth outer surface, and its porous interior, in the particular manner in which the green is modulated” (345). Cézanne, according to Merleau-Ponty's analysis, paints an object in a way that it communicates as that object. Viewers then look at the painted object as part of the world, rather than as an aesthetic object that refers back to that world. In *Quad*, the figures are actively experiencing action, rather than enacting action. In turn, these viewers experience immersed perception. This impression is exacerbated as viewers may be considered to be complicit in the presented action. Mechanical sounds and footstep sounds drive the viewers perception of the piece, much as they drives the figures' action. The viewer is compelled to watch the presented pattern of action in real time, and, in addition is involved with the experience of watching. The figures are active walkers and active watchers and may be considered as an audience within the art. As such, they demand active perception by the actual audience. The audience and the viewer-figures share an experience of perception, and it is thus that *Quad*, like Cézanne’s vase, is phenomenologically important. The viewer, through the shared experience of watching, is able to be cogent of the physicality of presented images.

### *Television as medium*

This heightened sensory awareness is exacerbated due to Beckett's use of the medium of television. Julian Murphet describes the way in which televised images are perceived as constant movement:

The different parts of the display correspond to different phases in time such that there is never a moment when the entire image is spatially or temporally present to us. We perceive an image because the sequential phosphors continue to glow in overlapping durations and because the scanning process is so rapid. (Murphet, “Voice, Image,

Television”)

Thus the physical process of watching *Quad* creates another layer of synchronicity between viewer and figures, as comprehension of the whole is impossible. The viewer's eyes and ears must work in order to create the image, much as the figures' bodies must ceaselessly move in order to create that image. As well as being required to catch moments from televisual flux, the image may be considered to be necessarily fractured and blurry, thus the viewer is responsible for the clarity and coherency of the image:

The television image... was created by a “light through” process, similar to that in which light shines through stained glass, creating mosaic patterns that observers must reassemble... Television is also low definition, its borders imprecise, its images blurry. (Ben-Zvi, “Beckett and Television”, 477)

The viewer's immediate task is to take part in the physical action of perception. Viewers catch the *Quad* figures in the midst of restless, eternal activity, presented in a medium which is itself in restless, eternal flux.

The medium of television is additionally significant as it was, at the time, a medium without an artistic tradition. At the time of *Quad*'s production, television was in a period of “protracted overlap between monochrome and colour” (Murphet, “Voice, Image, Television”). While colour television quickly became “the postmodern dominant”, black and white television remained present in a residual way (Murphet, “Voice, Image, Television”). Beckett, in shooting *Quad II* in black and white, was thus able to make use of a medium which was about to become obsolete, yet had “not yet been subjected to any methodical act of formalisation” (Murphet). Colour television, too, while being the dominant medium of its period, had not been explored in terms of its potential for art. Beckett's theatre pieces are necessarily part literary tradition, and exist in relation to precedents such as James Joyce, and

contemporaries such as Ionesco and Pinter. Beckett's television, however, is like no other television. When Beckett writes theatre, then, his exploration of that media is concerned with critiquing and invigorating the tradition. When Beckett writes for television, however, he explores new territory. Beckett's television is, effectively, unnamable, as there are no available labels. Works comparable to *Quad* have been produced, such as Chris Burden's *Through the Night Softly* of 1973, in which the artist is filmed at close range crawling through glass. Burden bought “ten seconds of television advertisement time on a local Los Angeles channel and us(ed) it to show, without any comment, an excerpt from *Through the Night Softly*” (Van den Bergh, 253). Burden, however, is considered a performance artist, and evidently had explicit political aims in the broadcasting of this piece, that is, he worked to “subvert commercial television”, rather than to explore the artistic possibilities of television itself (253). While Beckett shares elements of contemporary performance art, his work remains a unique exploration of the television media.

In addition to being vital to the expression of *Quad*, television contributes to the content of the piece. It is thus that *Quad* may be considered to be *about* the medium of television, as Elizabeth Klaver describes:

Images slowly materialize out of the blankness at the edges of the quadrangle; accompanied by the beat of a drum they pace the series of triangles and finally sink back into blankness. Writing across the screen, they outline for a brief moment the trace of their own progress in photons of light and replicate in the playing area the shape of the television set. *Quad I* is a thoroughgoing made-for-television project, defining metatextual space in the self-conscious generation of its grid within the screen and inseparable from the unique “writing” capacities of television itself. (Klaver, 374)

Thus, the way said and the what said of *Quad* both consider the phenomena of television. The connection between viewer and figure is, in turn, strengthened as while figures create the image through the act of walking, the viewer creates the image through the act of seeing. In addition, the figures' movement dramatises the act of creation of the television space, while being broadcast on television. The viewer is unable to accept the image passively, as they might other moving images, as the art continually points to the process of its own construction. Thus the play is continually being created before the viewers' eyes, rather than being presented as finished.

### *Demand for empathy*

In *Quad*, the viewer, in addition to doing perceptual work in response to the nature of televisual imagery, is required to connect with the figures through a process of direct physical empathy<sup>21</sup>. This process is opposed to the demand for sympathetic response that Keith Oatley, in his 'Taxonomy of the Emotions of Literary Response', describes as being typical of fiction:

Fictional simulations run on people's minds. For them to run successfully readers (a) adopt a character's goals and use their own planning procedures to connect actions together meaningfully, (b) form mental models of imagined worlds, (c) receive speech acts addressed to them by the writer, and (d) integrate disparate elements to create a unified experience. (Oatley, 53)

While this model may be applied to *Quad*, in that the reader is clearly involved in the creation of meaning and character, the definition is lacking in its ability to describe the connection

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<sup>21</sup> I refer here to the Oxford Dictionary's distinction between empathy and sympathy: "Empathy means 'the ability to understand and share the feelings of another' (as in both authors have the skill to make you feel empathy with their heroines;), whereas sympathy means 'feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune' (as in they had great sympathy for the flood victims)" ("empathy"). It is interesting to note that the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy specifies, in addition, that "empathy is invoked in the suggestion that some aesthetic experiences have us feeling as if we ourselves are part of the object, as when we tense our muscles while we look at a flying buttress" (Blackburn).

between figure and viewer in Beckett's work. Throughout his oeuvre, Beckett presents characters that do not elicit sympathy (as defined by Oatley) as their “goals” are not known to the viewer, and indeed, are not known to the characters themselves. In *Quad*, the reason for movement is not provided: “The figures have no discernible purpose, apart from negotiating their courses and avoiding both the centre and each other... coming and going because they have no option” (Gardner, 165). Similarly, Beckett's characters' imagined worlds are often ambiguous and indescribable, as the unnamable, for example, consistently denies his own assertions: “The next time they enter the field... I shall know they are going to collide, fall and disappear, and this will perhaps enable me to observe them better. Wrong. I continue to see Malone as darkly as the first time” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 7). In addition, their speech is often fractured, and “unified experience” is presented as something that is essentially unachievable. *Quad* itself offers no insight into “imagined worlds”, nor does it address “speech acts” to the viewer. Thus, Beckett connects with his viewers in a way that is not encompassed by Oatley's literary emotional response. Adam Piette posits that Beckett, rather than eliciting sympathy from readers/viewers, works to systematically deny sympathy:

His narrators deny their own powers of sympathy; aim to kill off all feeling; seek to destroy communicable affect through a purging of language's capacity to represent; lay bare the conventions controlling the eliciting of sympathy; desire to cripple all performances through an acid-bath dissolution of objects of desire, including all strangers, friends and foe. (Piette, 281)

For Piette, Beckett's works deny normative emotional responsiveness, as they do not act as “invitations to feel” (281). However, Beckett's works do act to affect their audiences, despite Beckett's refusal to communicate emotional content. Thus Beckett refers to Barthes' alternative semiotics, wherein the physical properties of language (here, visual language),

rather than its communicative content informs the viewer. Piette describes how Beckett's presented "affect-censorship" causes viewers/readers to respond similarly, by performing "blockages to feeling" (282). This means that affect becomes enigmatic: "In particular, the blocked affect will be enacted through simulation in the form of baffled mystery, as estranging enigma – the secretiveness a direct consequence of the white noise produced by the narrator's screening effacements of all feeling" (282-3). In *Quad*, the moving figures do not naturally seem to demand an emotional response as they appear to exist outside of the normal range of human behaviour, and viewers, consequently, have no precedent on which to base their sympathy. As viewers block sympathy, then, they are estranged from the affective elements of the art. This results in an "elusive feeling of strangeness and bafflement", which, in turn, becomes powerful as it serves to open the text to possibility (284). Amongst uncertainty, the viewer must become a contributing creator of emotional meaning. The affectiveness of *Quad* may be described as inspiring an empathetic viewer response, as it is based on the shared experience of actively making meaning. As the figures make images through their movement, the viewer, in the face of strangeness, shares the creative experience. Piette describes this process as "affect performance", and specifies its application to Beckett's images of faces. While *Quad* considers bodies rather than faces, Piette's description is applicable as:

Affect performance is defined by... conjuring acts. The retrieval of forgotten affect through visionary encounters with the face is offered to the reader as textual trace – and acts as a performative of sorts, having the reader perform the affects generated by the same inscrutable face. (292)

Here, the reader is defined by his/her empathetic performance, rather than an ability to understand presented emotion at a symbolic level.



This “affect performance”, in turn, aligns Beckett with the visual arts, wherein artists engage, primarily, in unconditional representation rather than lexical representation. Noël Carroll describes unconditional representation as “the sort of representation that obtains by triggering the audience's innate recognitional capacities”, and lexical representation as “coded, or lexicographic, or semiotic. In those cases, in order to realise that x stands for y, a spectator must know the relevant codes” (Carroll, 50 and 51). Carroll then goes on to describe the uses of such modes of expression in art:

painting, drawing, sculpture and photography can be distinguished from music... due to their heavy reliance on unconditional representation, whereas, in turn, they use lexical representation far less than literature does. This is not to neglect the fact that there are pictorial codes, but only to note that however important they are for these artforms, they are still less fundamental here than they are with respect to literature. (55)

Beckett's *Quad* poses certain complications in that it is, as well as being literature, a television piece and a dance. One may also describe the rhythmic footfalls as a kind of music. It is a true blend of media, and it is necessarily fraught to discuss it simply in terms of a dichotomy of literature and painting. However, as *Quad* expresses itself primarily in terms of “unconditional representation”, it may be considered to express itself as a visual arts piece. To return to Piette's explanation of affect in Beckett's work, it is interesting to note the emphasis placed on the human face:

the face with its enigmatic force... ‘extending *beyond* the unknown’... demands a primordial response from the observer *before* subjectivity: ‘The face itself constitutes the fact that *someone summons me* and demands my presence’. It summons because of its very mystery, the enigma of otherness.... Its enigmatic force, then, lies in its

‘questioning which, *ipso facto, summons me*’. And it is proximity (being face-to-face) that triggers questioning, the move beyond the being/non-being intermittence to a radical response to the call of human otherness. (Emmanuel Levinas, qtd in Piette, 288)

While Beckett focuses on the presentation of bodies, those bodies are recognisably human, as well as recognisably enigmatic, as the reason for their movement is essentially ungraspable. Faces are connected to the senses due to their unique ability to cause the viewer to respond in an affective manner. Similarly, “bodies (including images)... constitute everything that is able to act on, or react to, a motor stimulus” (Gardner, 8). Piette's description of the enigmatic face is, then, applicable to *Quad*'s bodies. In light of Piette's statement, *Quad* appears comparable to Johannes Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*<sup>22</sup>, as this painting contains a human figure depicted in engaged perception. Such paintings are unique in their ability to invite the viewer in to the painted space:

(Vermeer is) manipulating the underlying syntactic elements of color perception in a material-sensual way so that these elements are articulated at their most sensitive and perceptive. I suggest this heightens the senses, including the ability to think, as itself an integral part of the entire physical body. The relative lack of moral or narrative in the paintings does little to intrude on this process by telling the viewer what to think or what moral to follow. It operates almost as if the person viewing the Vermeer painting is a musical instrument and the painting is playing the person, while the person also plays the painting, in a reciprocal musical performance. The body, including the mind, as an interconnecting system is thus being worked upon. (Singh, 164-5)

Vermeer, then, addresses the viewer directly by evoking a sensory response. There is very little “lexical representation” to guide the viewer along narrative lines. The viewer is,

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 5.

subsequently, involved in the painting; their body is “played” by the painting. In *Quad*, the presentation of human movement is similarly physically involving and thus affective in a similar way to Vermeer's milkmaid, and Piette's human face: it “demand(s) human response” (Piette, 291). This reading necessarily simplifies the effect of Beckett's art on its audience, as it does not consider the huge variation in individual response to presented stimuli. However, it seeks to illuminate the existence of a link between Beckett's bodily art and a concept of bodily empathy, so as to attempt partial explanation of *Quad*'s aesthetic power.

Federman similarly focuses on the unique subjectivity of Beckett's works, and posits that their power lies in affecting the audience in a way similar to painterly expression, particularly abstract painterly expression. Federman describes Beckett's *Breath*, another work entirely without words “as an image, as a tableau, as a picture... and once it has been seen on the screen it remains engraved in one's mind. A pile of garbage, light, darkness, and the cry of a baby. What a striking tableau that represents” (Federman, “The Imagery Museum”). Later in his lecture, Federman compares Beckett's work to the “great abstract paintings”<sup>23</sup>, which focus on treatment of colour and line rather than the expression of any particular meaning.

Federman's discussion is notable in the way it equates the affective power in Beckett's work with its imagery, however, the argument suffers as he adopts an extreme formalist point of view: “And therefore it becomes irrelevant to ask, what do they mean, what are they saying to us, just as one does not ask of a great painting, what does *it* mean” (Federman). While I also argue that *Quad* is visually focused, I posit that its meaning is also necessarily important.

Indeed, that meaning is able to work complementarily with formal elements such as color and line to create *Quad*'s unique imagery. Iona Singh, in her analysis of Vermeer's painting, states that “The body, including the mind” is involved in perception, thus whilst the painter does not dictate meaning, this does not exclude meaning. Similarly, the power of *Quad*'s abstract

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<sup>23</sup> Federman here refers to the paintings of Jackson Pollock, Clyford Still, Robert Motherwell and Mark Rothko.

imagery lies in its ability to continually create meaning, as the viewer continually responds with his/her own creativity, rather than in the denial of meaning.

### *Quad's mathematics*

The involvement of the viewer in the production of *Quad's* art is contributed to by its particular mathematics of randomness:

Even though it is highly disciplined and mathematically precise, *Quad I* nevertheless produces a sense of randomness, in part by implying that the viewer could enter and leave the matrix at any given corner, as the figures do. As well, the explosive, exponential force driving the action of the play seems almost uncontrollable. (Klaver, 373)

In this statement, Klaver describes how apparently patterned movement begets randomness in the form of possibility. *Quad I* is repeated to the point of becoming boring and predictable, and then becomes strange, much as a word often repeated morphs into abstract sound. *Quad I* then changes seemingly illogically into *Quad II* and thus demands that the viewer reinterpret any assumptions s/he has made in regards to the image. In addition to this major change, the image changes with the entrances of each successive figure into the square in *Quad I*, as the viewer is not likely to be certain of how many figures to expect. Similarly, each successive exit of the figures is likely to be unexpected, as is the repetition of the entire pattern. Beckett, in *Quad* presents figures-as-audience absorbed in the process of watching the scene of unexplained, disciplined movement. This engaged attitude works with the mathematical randomness to allow for the possibility that the actual audience, who also watches from the sidelines, may enter through the curtains and start walking. While the viewer does not, literally, enter the action, the viewer is shocked into an activeness and awareness of the processes of listening and seeing. Federman, in the documentary *Waiting for Beckett* further

describes the importance of the unexpected in Beckett: “I think when you read Beckett, when you watch Beckett, you learn to listen, to speak, to see better. That's what he's done to us, he's teaching us to see things we have never seen before” (*Waiting for Beckett*, 2.13). Thus, *Quad* is exceptional in that it makes strange the processes of listening and seeing due to its refusal to ascribe to laws of consistency. The viewer becomes uniquely aware of sensory information, and thus “experiences” the text. Federman's assertion may be compared to Kant's philosophy, which considers art to work by shocking the senses and, in turn, to shock the viewer/reader into thought: “What is encountered is not an object but a difference in sensation, one that wounds or strains existing categories of sense perception, and that transmits a shock to thought because it disrupts thought's ready concepts, determining instead a mutation in thought” (Wasser, 124). Thus, unexpected change begets a sense of possibility, and thus contributes to the openness of the piece to the presence of viewers.

In addition to being periodically shocked, viewers of *Quad* are slowly surprised, as *Quad* is, effectively, an image that is able to continue infinitely. The absorption of the presented figures in their activity of walking and watching suggests that they may continue indefinitely in the same attitude. Carolynne Quinn, in her discussion of Cézanne's paintings displays the effectiveness of an infinite aesthetic:

Cézanne would in some works repeatedly mark a multiplicity of outlines around a figure (refusing a single clean silhouette), thus subverting any impression we may have that the outlines of objects exist prior to our sense-making creative perception of them. As Merleau-Ponty writes, when Cézanne's pictures are seen in their wholeness, their “perspectival distortions are no longer visible in their own right, but rather contribute, as they do in natural vision, to the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes.” (Quinn, 13-14)

Beckett, in *Quad*, similarly fosters multiplicity rather than a “clean silhouette”, as viewer input is required to create meaning and image in the television play. The “outline” of *Quad*, then, depends on the viewer's “creative perception”. In addition, *Quad* may be considered to be a developing rather than a static image, as the image's peculiar mathematics demands continual change rather than predictability. *Quad*, like Cézanne's paintings, is an image that is in the process of being created through its broadcast time, rather than an image that is still and pre-formed. *Quad* may therefore be comfortably considered to be an important phenomenological text. However, phenomenology is not the only working theory for Beckett's art, and there is a point at which the application of that philosophy becomes untenable, as can be observed from the following statement by Mark Wrathall:

The artist fosters a special skill, then: that of learning to look at the world in such a way that she can discern the meanings of the world.... Each painting that succeeds in making us see something directly, that is without functioning as a symbol that we associate with the object through a kind of mental act, will have partially unlocked the secret of vision. (Wrathall, 21)

Phenomenologists, in light of this statement, consider truth to be possible, as artists are considered to be able to unlock secrets of vision, and phenomenological analysis to be able to access those secrets. Beckett's work, however, denies easy access to truth. It may be said that Beckett is adept at creating visions and at producing means of access to those visions for his audience, yet those visions function primarily to suggest possibility and multiplicity, rather than to propose an undeniable truth of the work. Beckett's ability to involve the viewer's senses in their perception of his art functions to inspire thought rather than answers, and each perceived vision is as powerful as it is arguable. Derrida's concept of aporia is relevant to this discussion as it evokes speechlessness, and an experience of impossibility:

1. As its name indicates, an experience is a traversal, something that traverses and travels towards a destination for which it finds the appropriate passage. The experience finds its way, its passage, it is possible. And in this sense it is impossible to have a full experience of aporia, that is, of something that does not allow passage. An aporia is a non-road. From this point of view, justice would be the experience that we are not able to experience.... But, 2. I think that there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia. Justice is an experience of the impossible. (qtd in Uhlmann, "The Same and the Other", 143)

The figures in *Quad* may be considered to face Derrida's aporia as there is no real "passage" for them; no destination for their wanderings. The figures move in an absorbed, engaged way, yet there is no obvious reason why they move this way. Beckett's philosophy, as presented in *Quad* is more or less, a pure question, as Fritz Mauthner has described: "the question per se, a question without content." (Ben-Zvi, "Beckett, Mauthner", 184). Anthony Uhlmann, in his analysis of *The Unnamable*, evokes Beckett's peculiar philosophy of indefinability, and whilst here I am discussing *Quad*, Uhlmann's supposition is readily applied to Beckett's oeuvre:

If it were a philosophical text we might note that Beckett seeks to proceed neither by affirmation (as in a purely positive ontology such as that of Spinoza) or negation (as in the progression by negation Derrida identifies in the work of Levinas) nor by the synthesis of thesis and antithesis as in Hegelian dialectic, but through the more or less pure positing of a question mark. The procedure of this questioning apparently marks a limit where Beckett veers away from philosophical discourse: he proceeds, in fact, through unsubstantiated supposition. This pure supposition, however, is always haunted by aporia: the narrator constantly reminds us of the provisional nature of his guesses. The suppositions then, never serve as a stable ground on which to build but

carry with them and draw attention to the question mark of the question. (Uhlmann, “The Same and the Other”, 129)

Beckett's art, then, does not proceed logically, nor are his arguments justified. On the other hand, Beckett is no practitioner of meaninglessness, as his works are full of truths, though these truths are open to argument and have multivalent meaning. Beckett's work is not based on the truth of experiential reality, nor is it simply based on the truth of “the virtual configuration of ideas” (Wasser, 128). Rather, it presents images that affect human beings by evoking experience *and* thought, as well as thought *through* sensory experience. The works are notable in that the more they are interrogated, the more they remain open to interpretation. If Beckett's work is indefinable, then, the role of the viewer and critic becomes questionable, as this role is necessarily based in understanding and defining. In this case, phenomenological theory, which posits that certain artists enable viewers to experience art, and thus to understand it in a way similar to the way in which they understand real life objects, becomes applicable once again. However, as Brough tells us: “The point of seeing a film... is not to hallucinate or to have reality all over again, but to experience that peculiar kind of thing, the image, which can do what ordinary things, such as flowers or stones, cannot do, that is, be about something or have a content” (Brough, 200). Thus, when the experiential connection between viewer and painter, or in this case, viewer and mixed-media practitioner, is forged strongly, so too is the connection between that experience and thought. It is through the viewer that Beckett's art, then, becomes a philosophical venture, though that philosophy remains one of possibility rather than one that hopes to answer any riddles.

#### *Art-as-subject*

It is important to note that Beckett's primary subject matter, according to my analysis of *Quad*, is the nature of art. It is possible to read the patterned movement of *Quad*'s figures



psychologically, wherein movement occurs due to the mindset of the mimes; due to desire, duty or some authorial demand to keep going ad infinitum. This, however, provides undue emphasis on narrative ideals, as it assumes that characters must have motivation to carry out action. Beckett makes such conclusions seem profoundly inappropriate as it is impossible to determine why the figures would want to move, or to define the force that drives them. Psychological conclusion pays insufficient attention to the importance of inexplicability and thus greatly narrows the potential of Beckett's art. The question that begs to be asked, then, is why make art at all if it cannot be understood. Brater has said that "The images seem vague as telecast, but always concrete, as if their visualization, not their meaning, were the dramatist's true subject" (50-1). In this, Brater confirms that *Quad*'s purpose is to dramatise the nature of art itself. As discussed, Beckett is concerned with the phenomenologically engaged attitude of experiencing art, in which the viewer is a part of the action. Beckett also evokes the exhaustion of language by bodies to a point of creative action and, at the same time, impossible, aporetic experience. Primarily, then, *Quad*'s themes may be described as seeing, experiencing, and the end of expression, or, as Jonathan Bignell has said: "Beckett's return to the apparent building-blocks of perceptual sense-making can be understood as a critical project to repeat the process of 'learning to see' in order to defer and differentiate it: to suggest precisely the non-necessity of its conventional forms" (Bignell, 287). Beckett's subject, in this piece for television, and, indeed in the vast majority of his oeuvre, has been focused on experimenting with art forms at the most basic level. His art suggests that its viewers focus on the processes of seeing and perceiving. Beckett, I posit, is a painterly writer, as he seeks to foreground the mode of expression in the construction of his artworks, as well as in the viewer's reception of those artworks. *Quad*, which is made for the medium of television, acts as a retrospective of a life's concern with such themes, as it directly dramatizes the process of

“learning to see”, as well as the process of paring down the superfluous. The active process of watching that is required by television, and the lack of precedent in that medium for such art, other than his own earlier television pieces mean that *Quad* can be considered as one of Beckett's most direct works. The fact that *Quad* is wordless and abstracted, and that it concerns itself with human reception of the visual makes it a convincing argument for the idea that Beckett is and always has been a visually focused artist, and that his continual movement away from verbal language was purposeful and of paramount importance rather than incidental.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has discussed the development of Beckett's work, from a verbal language focus to a visual language focus. In Beckett's solely textual works, such as *The Unnamable*, a preoccupation with visual language is nascent, as Beckett considers the way said of language through foregrounding techniques such as word sounds. In addition, Beckett, through his presentation of an unreliable narrator, opens the text up for argument and demands that the reader make experiential connections with the piece. *The Unnamable*, consequently, communicates closely with the reader's sensory capacities, and utilises language in a way similar to that used in visual expression. I refer here to the idea that in visual media, aesthetic experience remains intimately connected to the viewer's actual experience of sensory stimuli such as colour, tone and line. In Beckett's silent works, such as *Film* and *Quad*, a concern with verbal language is observable, albeit to a continually lessening degree. In *Film*, for example, Beckett focuses on visual language as subject matter, rather than visual language as a mode of expression, as the piece narrates the story of escape from self perception. *Quad*, on the other hand, may be considered to exist primarily as a moving picture, yet still, in its exhaustion of combinatory possibilities of movement, to refer in a residual way to the concerns of verbal language. Similarly, the increasing level of minimalism in the progression from *Quad I* to *Quad II* refers to Beckett's general project of shedding the inherent superfluities of verbal language.

In the context of Beckett's body of work, *Film* functions to allow consideration of perception as subject matter; to tell the “story” of perception. In turn, *Film* provides a philosophical platform for the consideration of imagery, and is able to provide reference material for Beckett's creation of images that appeal to perception in their own right. *Quad* is an example of one such image, as in this piece, Beckett communicates with the viewer, almost

exclusively, through visual and aural stimuli. *Quad* exists primarily as an image of moving bodies accompanied by the sounds of feet. In addition, the bodies do not move in order to advance a narrative, rather, they endlessly retrace a pattern of movement. Thus, in *Quad* the “story” of perception as developed in *Film* has become an image of perception.

Beckett's oeuvre is unique in its wide exploration of media, as he has written novels, poems, critical works, plays for stage, plays for radio, a silent film, as well as pieces for television. It is this combination, of media exploration and concern with stretching the capacity of those media in terms of the language that they deploy, that means Beckett must be considered to be engaged in a project other than, simply, writing. I argue that Beckett's project is one of breaking with habitual forms of communication, and, in turn, defamiliarising the reader or viewer with habitual acts of reading or viewing presented texts. Beckett's project has the effect of directly communicating inexplicably powerful imagery to the reader/viewer. This can be observed repeatedly from descriptions of Beckett's works, wherein whole plays prove able to be summarised as visual impressions. *Rockaby*, for example, has been variously described as a play “where the female figure physically rocks herself off into the spheres of the dead and the unborn” and as “[t]he riveting image of a gray-haired woman” (Ostmeier, 197 and Zefiman, 240). In addition, Brater has noted that, in *Rockaby*, “Beckett... makes us see the same figure in different artificial lights, offering us an ever-shifting series of perspectives from which to encounter the image anew” (Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, 168). As well as leaving such definitive impressions, Beckett defamiliarisation of the process of communication articulates the depth of uncertainty of meaning. While the idea that Beckett both dictates meaning and leaves meaning open ended may appear to be at odds, it seems that they both function, rather, to enhance the visual impression of Beckett's art. In the latter case, the arguable nature of presented meaning demands that the reader/viewer enters into the

creative fabric of the text in order to create meaning. This activity means that, rather than simply observing the text, the reader/viewer experiences the text, as they are, to a certain extent, implicated in its creation. In light of the depth of sensory information presented by Beckett's works, this created meaning is necessarily influenced by visual language as well as verbal language. The reader/viewer's experience of the text is defined by their making images as well as philosophies and verbal-language based conclusions. Rather than saying that Beckett makes stage images and is therefore a painter, then, this thesis discusses Beckett's connection with elements that, more usually, define impressions left by visual artworks. Beckett is able to connect with his viewers and readers on an experiential level, as well as by leaving strong sensory impressions. Thus, Beckett is a writer who does not limit himself to verbal language. Rather, Beckett's project becomes one of critiquing that language, and, progressively, offering expressive alternatives.

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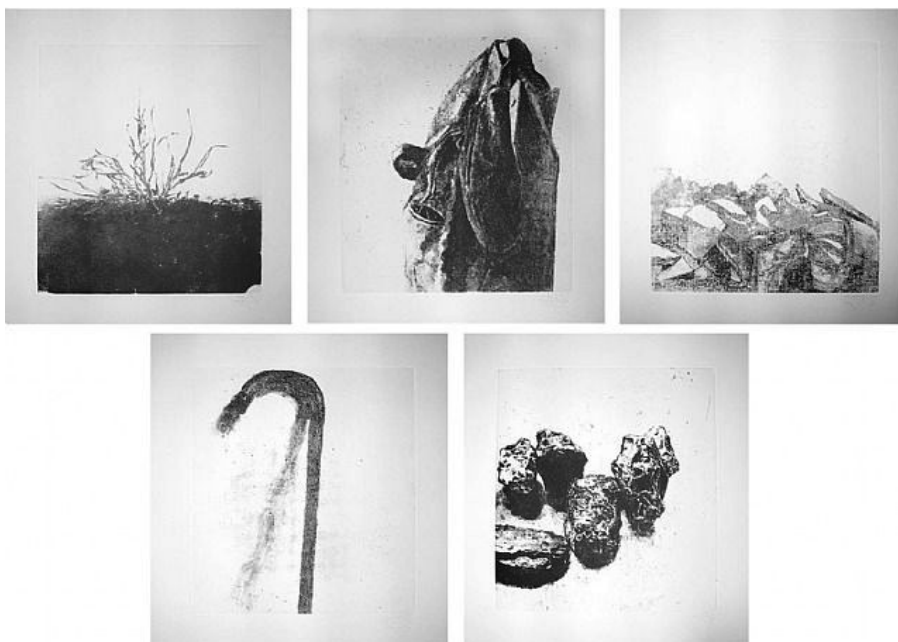
## APPENDICES OF IMAGES

## Appendix 1



Still from *Not I*

## Appendix 2



Avigdor Arikha, *Au Loin un Oiseau*



## Appendix 3



Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles*

## Appendix 4



Paul Cézanne, *Apples and Oranges*

## Appendix 5



Johannes Vermeer, *The Milkmaid*